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by

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**The Many Forms of Theatre for the Very Young:  
A Look into Development Processes**

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**The Many Forms of Theatre for the Very Young:  
A Look into Development Processes**

**by**

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**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family, the one I was born into as well as the family I have found along my way.

To Shawn, Ryan, Mary Kay, Jenny, My Dad and Mom for showing me that you can get back up no matter how many times you fall down. You taught me to be curious, strong and to always keep moving forward.

To my niece Erin Marie, my cousin Becca and my 'niece' Genevieve that you each know you possess the ability to do great things and are afforded the opportunities to make your dreams reality. I hope you continue to be curious, passionate and imaginative as you grow up.

“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.” –Albert Einstein

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## **Abstract**

### **The Many Forms of Theatre for the Very Young: A Look into Development Processes**

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As Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) has only begun to be produced in the United States within the past 10 years, little is written about how the work is being developed and produced. This thesis serves to acknowledge the impact international TVY practice has on US work while simultaneously providing insight into development processes. This document questions: What goals, considerations and limitations exist when developing TVY? Who is currently creating TVY? How does the context for the creation of a piece influence the development process and the product? Within this thesis I examine the processes of current TVY practitioners and identify three different organizational structures where TVY is currently being created. I also cite examples from TVY development processes I have engaged in within each organizational structure. Finally, I name how engaging with and in TVY has impacted my evolution as a TVY practitioner.

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## Chapter One: *Defining Theatre for the Very Young*

### Introduction

As colorful balls were poured out over the stage by two actors, a group of over twenty two-year-old children from the University of Texas at Austin Child Development Center stood and took the stage knowing this was their invitation to become a part of the play. These children were watching the first performance of *HANDS*, a Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) piece I created in March 2011, and were now about to engage in dramatic play alongside the two actors. As the children reenacted moments of the performance, handing the actors props to replay earlier pieces of the play, I was both astounded and thrilled to recognize that these children were not only having an artistic experience, they were also learning.

I have always enjoyed working with young children, watching them grow and seeing them delight in discovering new things. I think back to the first performance of *HANDS* and remember the joy of seeing the balls roll across the stage as the smiling children stood to engage with the actors just as I had anticipated. When I first crafted the proposal for *HANDS* I wrote about wanting to investigate where pedagogy meets performance in designing a visual theatre piece for children under age three. I had never seen a performance for children this young, but had worked with this age group and felt crafting a performance that was accessible for the very young would be an exciting experiment. In preparing this proposal, I looked to see if I could find companies and practitioners making work for preschoolers and even infants. This research resulted in my discovery of TVY. As I continue to experiment and explore the world of TVY my

purpose remains to create TVY performances that provide young children the highest quality artistic and educational experience possible.

With this purpose in mind, I have taken great joy in learning from established TVY practitioners, engaging in development processes, and finally in identifying and refining my own artistic process. This thesis follows my journey as I engaged in the development of three distinct pieces of TVY. First, I chronicle and analyze my work in developing *Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath* through the SPARK! Theatre Ensemble, a group I founded in 2011, at the University of Texas at Austin. I then interrogate Patch Theatre Company's development process for *The Moon's a Balloon*. Lastly, I explore a piece created through a partnership between The University of Texas at Austin and Patch Theatre Company entitled *The Balloon Project*. In entering each of the three processes, I sought spaces to gain insight from performers and members of the production teams to help me better capture and understand the experience of developing work for a very young audience. In order to gain an understanding of how different development processes function, I have given specific attention to the form, goals and intentions chosen for each development process. I also looked to identify how organizational structures impact both the development process and the final product for these three pieces of TVY.

I engaged in this research through a variety of source materials that include: published literature on TVY, a survey of theatre-makers throughout their development process, interviews with a variety of TVY practitioners, and my own field notes from first-person observations of each process and product. The intent of this thesis is to

examine different processes of development for TVY, provide insight to the field about TVY, and create a space for my own reflection on how engaging in these three particular development processes has impacted my evolution as a theatre-maker. As I have engaged in my thesis work, I have come to name that all three productions enact intentional design; in other words the theatre-makers account for the developmental, social and emotional needs of a their intended audience in the design of their pieces.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will look at defining Theatre for the Very Young. I will establish key terms and definitions that I use throughout my thesis. Additionally, I will offer a brief history of Theatre for the Very Young. This history will examine how international work has impacted US practices as well as offering my picture of the field at this time. Next, I will identify national trends and current practices to provide context for future chapters which primarily focus on the three development processes in which I have engaged for my thesis.

### **Defining Theatre for the Very Young**

Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) is an umbrella term often used to describe a variety of theatre work and practices intentionally designed for children under the age of six. Artistic performance for early years audiences is an emerging practice, so no widely accepted definition of TVY currently exists. In conversation with theatre practitioners, I have found that many argue TVY must include interactive elements. Some question if installations or dance are excluded by the use of the word theatre. Others insist that TVY should only be used in reference to theatre designed for the youngest audience, only

encompassing theatre intended for children under three, four or five. Some practitioners prefer to reference their work as Baby Theatre, Theatre for the Early Years, Theatre for Preschoolers, Early Years Arts Programming or by various other names, although I would categorize their work as TVY. Even among practitioners who agree to the use of the term Theatre for the Very Young, disagreement still exists about whether the word “audiences” is needed. Several US practitioners reference work in this realm as Theatre for Very Young Audiences (TVYA), looking to tie more closely to Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), terminology often used in the US to reference theatre designed to be performed for youth (Alrutz 4-9; Mack *IPAY*; TYA USA Webinar).

I agree with Alrutz, Mack and Pinkert who each argue that TVY covers a wide variety of performance experiences for young children, ranging from more traditional theatrical productions to participatory theatre performances and installation art (Alrutz 4-9; Mack *IPAY*; Pinkert 60-67). As referenced by Small Size and Mack some TVY practitioners separate their work into two smaller age groupings, with many distinguishing between performances designed for children ages zero to three and those designed for children between three and six years old (Mack *IPAY*; Small Size). As a Theatre for the Very Young practitioner, I use TVY as an umbrella term to describe a variety of theatre work and practices intentionally designed for children under the age of six. Referring to performances designed exclusively for children under two years old as Baby Theatre I further break down TVY work referencing the popular term for theatre designed for infants and toddlers. Preschool Theatre is the term I use for performances designed for an audience of early learners, children ages two to six.

My decision to distinguish TVY as theatre intentionally designed to be performed for children under age six lies in my belief that TVY should be created in a way that takes into account the developmental, social and emotional needs of an audience that has not yet begun elementary school. I then label Baby Theatre as work for children birth through age two; with this terminology, I aim to acknowledge theatrical experiences and best practices that are designed specifically to account for the particular needs of children in their infancy. It is my goal to acknowledge that participation in early childhood education (ECE) programming shifts how audiences engage in a theatrical experience by labeling Preschool Theatre as designed for children ages two through six. Looking at the overlap of ages I find it important to note that age two is listed as both the end of Baby Theatre and the beginning of Preschool Theatre in my breakdown. This serves to acknowledge that between twenty-four and thirty-six months is commonly when children begin to engage in a structured ECE program of some sort. Many preschool programs allow children to start attending around thirty months in the United States, thus beginning young children on a gradual journey/transition towards elementary school.

In acknowledgment of the fact that young children develop at a rapid pace in their first few years of life, these breakdowns into Baby Theatre and Preschool Theatre align with shifting physical, cognitive and social skills. I have adopted these terms in order to help me define the different audiences I am working with on varying performances. With these categories I can more easily name the diverse challenges, needs and goals that come with each different age group. In making a distinction between Baby Theatre and Preschool Theatre I do not mean to imply that the two age groups I have named cannot be

served by the same piece of theatre nor that TVY should be created to serve audiences that fit solely into these age groupings. Over the past three years as I have studied many TVY performances I have found many performances that successfully serve audiences that span large age groupings or small segments within one of the categories. One example of a company serving a large age span is Imagination Stage.

Imagination Stage in Bethesda, Maryland has been regularly creating TVY since 2009. In that time, the amount of TVY programming offered by Imagination Stage has quadrupled, with all of their early childhood programming (TVY and ECE classes) being united under the title My First Imagination Stage. As noted on Imagination Stage's website, My First Imagination Stage advertises their original pieces as designed for children one to five years old, while pieces they present by outside companies sometimes feature age guidelines with a more narrow focus (Imagination Stage).

Imagination Stage's Artistic Director Janet Stanford and Director for Early Childhood Programs Katherine Bryer explain that they feel the same piece of TVY can serve their suggested four year age span by acknowledging that audience members of different age groups can be served in a variety of ways by the same piece of theatre. Both Stanford and Bryer note that the youngest audience members may react most strongly to the visual elements or moments where they are invited to physically engage in the performance. Older children take away much more of the narrative. Stanford explains, "As we get older, that active [participation] happens in your head, [but] as a 2-year-old, you're just as ready, willing and able to participate" (qtd. in Goldstein). To accommodate the broader age span, My First Imagination Stage features highly interactive, story-driven

performances naming the young audience members as ‘active participants’ in the theatre experiences they create (“My First Imagination Stage”). When creating work for very young audiences, it is important to acknowledge that a five-year-old brings very different life experiences and abilities to a performance than his or her one-year-old sibling. This does not mean that both children cannot be served by a single piece of theatre, but Bryer and Stanford acknowledge and account for the fact that children of different ages will experience the piece in different ways.

Examples of TVY designed to serve a narrow age range are often found in Baby Theatre. *Oogly Boogly*, a United Kingdom based performance created by Tom Morris, Guy Dartnell and Emma Gladstone, has one of the slimmest age guidelines, serving children between 12-18 months. On their website they note this age group was chosen after “extensive research” noting that toddlers’ mobility, language capabilities, and openness to exploration and spontaneity make this six-month age range ideal for their productions (*Oogly Boogly*). *Oogly Boogly* takes place in a ‘neutral space’ to limit distractions, while four performers mimic the movements of the young audience.

Australian practitioner Sally Chance created her work *This [Baby] Life* for a slightly broader age group of four to eighteen months. Chance engages in a similar practice of mimicry that she titles ‘matching’ in reference to the term used by attachment theorists for use of this practice within the Circle of Security (Chance). Premiering as part of the 2011 ComeOut Festival in Adelaide *This [Baby] Life* was one of the first pieces of theatre designed for children under age two in Australia. The performance came out of extensive research Chance conducted into the cultural life of babies causing her to name



that child development is so rapid that this very young audience is best served by a performance designed to meet them exactly where they are developmentally (Chance). *Oogly Boogly* and *This [Baby] Life* demonstrate how often small and precise age groupings are assigned to align with specific developmental traits that exist within a slim age group.

Narrow age groupings are not limited to Baby Theatre, Preschool Theatre is also known to offer a variety of age guidelines. One of my favorite narrative pieces of TVY is *White* directed by Andy Manley and produced by Catherine Wheels Theatre Company of Scotland. *White* is a scripted proscenium style performance that is geared for two to four-year-olds. Catherine Wheels on their website labels *White*, “a perfect first time theatre experience” (“White”). On the upper end of Preschool Theatre’s age bracket Patch Theatre Company (whose development processes will be detailed in later chapters) states in their mission that their work is designed to serve children ages four to eight. In order to best serve this age group Patch Theatre Company creates visual theatre pieces with open enough narratives to allow young children an opportunity for meaning-making at their developmental level.

For the purpose of this thesis I use TVY to encompass all theatrical experiences intentionally designed for children under age six. I name Baby Theatre as TVY designed for children birth through age two, and Preschool Theatre for performances designed for an audience of early learners, children ages two to six.

Sally Chance’s *This [Baby] Life* came out of extensive research into the cultural life of babies leaving her to name a narrow target audience she felt her piece could serve.

*Oogly Boogly* ties their age guidelines to characteristics they desire in their audience members. These characteristics coincide with the developmental state of typically developing children 12-18 months. Both My First Imagination Stage and Patch Theatre note broader age groupings with their age guidelines covering a period of four years, spanning outside the age brackets I name for Baby Theatre and Preschool Theatre. However both companies provide rationale for the age groups they target, acknowledging the large span of developmental needs their audience member bring to the theatre and addressing how their productions meet these needs. In each of these examples the practitioners take into account the developmental, social and emotional needs of their participants tailoring their pieces to suit the intended child audience. Each of the practitioners and companies above consider how their specific target audience is engaged as they envision and create intentionally designed TVY. The examples included in this section demonstrate how serving and naming the target age group for a piece of TVY is complex.

For the purpose of this thesis, I use TVY to encompass all theatrical experiences intentionally designed for children under age six. I name Baby Theatre as TVY designed for children birth through age two, and Preschool Theatre for performances designed for an audience of early learners, children ages two to six. I can see the case for producing work for both a very small and specific demographic, for example *Oogly Boogly*'s six month age span named above, as well as for serving a larger age range. Large age spans offer the ability to engage whole families, the opportunity for children to gain exposure to children outside their age group, and the possibility of challenging TVY practitioners to

identify how their performances may resonate in different ways with different children. A more narrow target audience allows artists to focus on the needs of children at one specific developmental stage. Ideally the age guidelines for a piece connect to the intention of the practitioners as they create and produce TVY.

### **An Incomplete History of Theatre for the Very Young**

Tracing the history of both US and international TVY proves difficult for several reasons. Because TVY is an emerging form in the US, there are still many questions that surround it, so the first challenge lies in identifying what qualifies for inclusion as TVY. This challenge was highlighted in the previous section by my need to define TVY, alongside the multiple names practitioners use in reference to their work, as no widely accepted definition currently exists. Second, though newer in the US, theatre companies in Europe and Australia have been creating this work for decades. Therefore some of the companies that produced early work in TVY no longer exist and the archival records even with companies still operating are scarce. Lastly one can never be entirely sure who the first artist or company to design a show for very young children was; so I will begin my history of Theatre for the Very Young by owning the idea that it is most certainly incomplete. My goal in providing a history is to contextualize my understanding of the form. I begin by examining how international practice has influenced US work and how TVY in the US has grown over the past decade.

La Baracca Teatro Testonia Ragazzi of Bologna, Italy first began their program '*Theatre and Nursery School*', a theatre-based project for children under three years, in

1987 (La Barraca). In addition to this programming La Baracca boasts a substantial body of work designed for children three to six years old. Their specialization in work with the under six age group led to the creation of their biennial festival *Visioni di futuro, visioni di teatro* (*Visions of Future, Visions of Theatre*) which was first held in 1999. In 2008 La Baracca was awarded the ASSITEJ (International Association of Theaters for Children and Young People) Award for excellence in recognition of their project “0-3 Years. *Theatre for the Very Young*” with ASSITEJ citing, “this company has been a leader in the evolution of the whole industry of theatre for the very young, they cooperate with other operators throughout Europe and organised the first festival of theatre for early years” (La Baracca).

La Baracca is often cited as one of the longest producing companies for TVY, however other companies have offered compelling work that has influenced the emergence of TVY in the US. In his 2010 American Theatre article entitled *Baby Theatre Comes of Age*, journalist Rob Weinert-Kendt notes that while “several artists in this field reverently cite an Italian cooperative called La Baracca [as the source for TVY], perhaps the most bold and instructive work of this kind was done by Stockholm’s Unga Klara, whose play *Babydrama* (2006) was designed for audiences of 12-15 babies and their caregivers” (Weinert-Kendt 46). Ellen Gamerman’s 2010 Wall Street Journal article notes that Susan Osten’s *Babydrama*, an 80-minute performance where ‘actors portray fetuses in the womb’, has been presented numerous times since 2005. The making of *Babydrama* was also captured in a documentary, allowing many practitioners around the world access to this piece. In Weinert-Kendt’s article, Linda Hartzell, Artistic Director of

Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT) names a piece for toddlers she saw in Denmark in 1990 as her very first encounter with TVY. While the first practitioner or company to embrace TVY cannot be named with certainty, it is widely accepted that the roots of TVY practice lie somewhere in Europe as most of the earliest documentation of TVY is of European work.

Much of the first TVY seen in the US was international work being presented, with the early work produced in the US largely the result of collaborations between US theatres and practitioners from abroad. Starting in 2007 Children's Theatre Company (CTC) of Minneapolis partnered with Denmark's Titus while that same year SCT began working with Australia's Windmill Theatre. While original TVY is beginning to develop in the US, US practitioners continue to be largely influenced by TVY practice from abroad. As Linda Hartzell noted in regards to European TVY in 2010, "We [in the US] are about 25 years behind on this" (Weinert-Kendt 42).

SCT first co-produced Windmill Theatre's *The Green Sheep* in 2007. They later produced their first original piece of TVY in the 2012-2013 season with *Dot and Ziggy*. This piece, while developed by SCT, had its world premiere at Chicago Children's Theatre before SCT's 2013 production. However prior to producing either of these pieces, SCT already had a long history of work for preschoolers including a production of Steven Dietz and Allison Gregory's *Go Dog Go!* in their 2002-2003 season. While *Go Dog Go!* could be considered a TVY piece SCT has not given it this label. Although *Go Dog Go!* is written for preschool audiences, it differs from *The Green Sheep* and *Dot and*

*Ziggy* in its use of scripted theatrical conventions versus the interactive and multi-sensory engagement of the two pieces SCT classifies as TVY.

Another artistic director leading the US in early work with TVY is Peter Brosius of the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) of Minneapolis who in 2005 brought a piece created by Denmark's Titut to CTC, later hiring the show's director to co-create a new piece at the theatre in 2007. Journalist Weinert-Kendt cites the New Victory Theatre in New York as a leading force in presenting international TVY demonstrating the impact that Director of Programming Mary Rose Lloyd has had on US TVY. Along with the New Victory, Weinert-Kendt notes the original work undertaken by Bethesda Maryland's Imagination Stage (who partnered with Lyngo Theatre of Italy on some of their early work) and The Alliance Theatre in Atlanta. The 2010 article mentions the newly established Arts on the Horizon, whose website claims they are "the first company in the United States to focus exclusively on producing theatre for children ages 0-6" (Arts on the Horizon). US TVY have direct connections to international TVY with US practitioners presenting and co-producing much of their early work with companies and practitioners from abroad.

While TVY first appeared in the US midway through the first decade of the twenty first century, a few international practitioners have been creating TVY since far earlier. The European TVY movement dates back to the early 1990s when a number of theatres in countries across Europe began creating TVY. In the early part of the twenty first century (2000-2005), European theatres and theatre practitioners began to organize into projects and networks focused on early arts. These projects and networks aimed to

make TVY more widely accessible and more easily understood for both artists and audiences. Unifying characteristics and definitions for TVY began to emerge as European artists, practitioners and researchers were brought together to plan, create, discuss and critically respond to the TVY being created (Small Size).

One example of a formative organization for European TVY is The Glitterbird Project. According to their website the Glitterbird Project brought together theatre practitioners from France, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Hungary and Finland with a project running from 2003-2006 aimed at producing and presenting art for children under the age of three. Funded through the EU Program Culture 2000 (Culture 2000), a program that supports transnational cooperative projects involving cultural expression, the aim of this project extended beyond ensuring arts were available to very young audiences. It looked to simultaneously create materials that would both inform and inspire artists to continue creating art suitable for the very young. Since the Glitterbird Project, other projects similar in nature have emerged, including some projects that look to bring practitioners from multiple countries together while other projects aim to unite early arts work within a singular country. Among these projects are Germany's Theater Von Anfang an! and Scotland's Starcatchers, these particular projects represent a move towards unified practice within a country, with both projects producing research reports that are available for practitioners interested in their findings.

One of the largest organizations dedicated to TVY is Small Size. Small Size is the European Network for the diffusion of performing arts aimed at early childhood (Ages zero to six). The network was established in 2005 by four professional theatre

organizations: La Baracca (Italy), Theatre de la Guimbarde (Belgium), Accion Educativa (Spain) and GOML - Gledalisce za otroke in miade - (Slovenia). Small Size was originally financed through the support of the European Commission and Culture 2000 adding three additional European theatres between 2005 and 2006: Helios Theater (Germany), Polka Theater (UK) and Teatrul Ion Creanga (Romania). In 2006, the European Commission and Culture 2000 funded Small Size's three-year project entitled *"Small Size, the net."* According to the Small Size website, the aim of this project was to extend the network across Europe and beyond through developing the web site, undertaking research and producing multi-media documentation with the belief that these efforts would "expand the potential for collaboration and exchange of professional development, expertise and practice" (Small Size). In 2009 Small Size, then boasting twelve theatres across twelve different European countries published their first annual report.

While Europe is largely seen as the birthplace of TVY, Australia also boasts a TVY tradition that has heavily influenced US practice. For example the Adelaide-based company Patch Theatre, with which I engaged in two development processes, began producing work in 1972. According to their website the company seeks to provide "a diverse repertoire of acclaimed, tour-ready productions for 4-8 year-olds and their families" (Patch Theatre Company). While I consider the work of Patch Theatre Company TVY because they intentionally design their work to serve children under the age of six; Patch Theatre Company's productions are not always considered TVY as their work is designed to serve audience members both above and below the age of six. So,



while Patch Theatre Company's programming pre-dates La Baracca's '*Theatre and Nursery School*' initiative they are not often credited for their early work in TVY.

Other Australian companies known internationally for their work in TVY include Windmill Theatre, Polyglot Theatre and Imaginary Theatre. Kite Arts Education Program of Queensland produced a single work, *Boat*, designed for children ages four to eight years old in 2007. While the program still exists their program focus appears to have shifted from artistic development to education work, with the production of *Boat* marking one of the first TVY performances created in Queensland. Cate Fowler is another Australian practitioner whose work led the evolution of TVY in Australia and the US. Windmill Theatre opened in 2002, here Fowler, the company's founding artistic director, directed both *Cat* and *The Green Sheep*. These two TVY performances continue to tour in Australia and abroad serving as well-known examples of Australian work in TVY. Both pieces are among some of the first TVY presented in the US, with *The Green Sheep* presented at SCT, CTC and The New Victory during their 2007-2008 seasons.

Australia's place in the landscape of TVY remains difficult to document from abroad, largely due to a shortage of archival materials available via the Internet or in US libraries. I faced these same challenges while attempting to document the evolution of European TVY. Therefore as I mentioned in my introduction to this section, my historical account falls short of encompassing the full history of TVY. I chose to include the history of TVY within this thesis, despite its incompleteness, as a way to document my understanding of the roots of TVY practice as known at this point in my career. Providing this account allows me to articulate how my current knowledge of TVY impacts my

understanding of practice and my own process of creating TVY. Therefore it aids me in chronicling my evolution as a practitioner.

### **National Trends and Current Practice**

Theatre for the Very Young in the United States has been largely influenced by international practice. As documented previously in this chapter, many US Theatres began their work in TVY by presenting work from abroad before moving into co-creating and producing pieces. It has only been in the last seven years that US companies began to experiment with the many forms of TVY creating their own original work. Even now many US theatre companies are still heavily influenced by European and Australian TVY as the majority of work US practitioners have been exposed to, was created by or with practitioners from abroad. My own evolution as a practitioner has been impacted by international practice with two of the three development processes I engaged in as part of my thesis linking to Australia's Patch Theatre Company (Patch). Even prior to my collaboration with Patch, I drew from what I have seen and read about from fellow theatre-makers abroad. With so much more TVY happening in Europe and Australia, I often re-created practices developed halfway around the world.

The numbers of US theatre companies producing and presenting original TVY is increasing, as is the amount of attention paid to the form and function of TVY by US practitioners. In 2012 TYA USA<sup>1</sup> hosted a webinar entitled "A Look at Producing, Writing, Directing, and Performing Theatre for the Very Young" that boasted three

<sup>1</sup> TYA USA is the United States Branch of ASSITEJ (International association of theaters for children and young people)

panelists and forty-three attendees making it one of the largest webinars TYA USA has hosted. At TYA USA's 2013 One Theatre World Conference in Cleveland, one of the four performances as well as three out of the fourteen sessions offered to attendees will focus on Theatre for the Very Young, allowing hundreds of US practitioners exposure to TVY practice. And in recognition of excellence in theatre-making the American Alliance for Theatre & Education (AATE) awarded Barry Kornhauser's *Balloonacy*, a TVY script, the 2012 Distinguished Play award. Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, GA; Imagination Stage in Bethesda, MD; and Arts on the Horizon in Arlington, VA currently feature full 'seasons' of TVY where families can order a subscription to attend each of the three or four TVY performances being offered that year. Seattle Children's Theatre and Children's Theatre Company of Minneapolis all continue to create new work in TVY, with each company including at least one TVY piece in their 2012-2013 season. Arts on the Horizon continues to thrive as one of the only theatres in the US focused solely on TVY. To date they have produced three original performances and are now offering educational programming in partnership with Head Start. In addition, numerous other theatres, large and small, across the US are experimenting with presenting, producing and developing new work in TVY.

While US TVY practice is growing, Europe still leads the way for TVY work, with European countries continuing to expand their repertoire of TVY and finding innovative ways to deepen the form. Scotland's Starcatchers began as the project of Imagine, a larger arts organization, in 2006. The goal of the project was to open opportunities to create TVY in Scotland through work with a select group of artists, with

their work mainly serving Edinburgh. Starcatchers has now grown, becoming an independent organization in 2011. According to their website Starcatchers now works with a wide range of associate artists and companies as part of their plan to develop the full potential of creativity for early years arts in Scotland. Looking to a large TVY network, Small Size continues to grow and while still European-based, their most recent publication *An Idea of Art and Childhood* featured a forward by US scholar Roger Berdard. This forward served as an acknowledgment that Small Size's identity has shifted. Their mission now reads, "The Artistic International Association Small Size is open to any European and non-European theatres and artists sharing its objectives: the diffusion of performing arts for early years (0-6) and, more generally, the promotion of culture for this age group" (Rosa and Sacchetti). The opening of Small Size to include organizations outside of Europe demonstrates an increasing belief that while Europe led the early development of TVY practice, artists across many nations are embracing and experimenting with the form.

Australian TVY also continues to grow in both the number of productions produced and the acclaim their use of the form receives nationally and internationally. In 2012 Patch Theatre Company, Imaginary Theatre and Polyglot Theatre all premiered new TVY pieces. Imaginary Theatre's *Look*, geared for ages two to five years premiered in Brisbane and then toured to the ASSITEJ Korea Summer Festival in Seoul. Meanwhile, Polyglot opened their first piece of Baby Theatre *How High the Sky* aimed at 'pre-walking babies and their parents or carers' (Dawkins). This same year Patch introduced *Me and My Shadow* designed for children four to eight years old, which was later

awarded the People's Choice Victor Award at the 2013 International Performing Arts for Youth Conference in Philadelphia. In summer 2013, TYA USA One Theatre World Conference will feature Windmill Theatre's Preschool Theatre piece *Grug*, making a stop in Cleveland during their North America tour. The above illustrates that Australian TVY has international appeal and continues to influence the US market.

Within the US, international TVY continues to be presented alongside local productions produced by universities, professional theatre companies and as the result of collaborations. Increasingly, collaborations are moving away from International theatre companies collaborating with US theatres, and towards collaborations between universities and professional theatres. Universities collaborating with professional theatres on TVY during the 2012-2013 academic year include Kean University in New Jersey partnering with Oily Cart to present *Ring a Ding Ding*, Arizona State University co-sponsoring master classes during La Baracca's 2013 festival and finally UT Austin's collaboration with Patch Theatre on *The Balloon Project*. Current national and international offerings demonstrate that TVY practice continues to gain momentum as TVY practitioners refine their artistic processes and continue to create new pieces exploring new ideas.

In this chapter, I introduced my practice in TVY and what drew me to begin work in this area. In defining TVY, I named some of the terminology I use to discuss work created for very young children. I identified current practice and identified national trends that help illuminate how TVY practice is evolving. In addressing the history of TVY, I examined how international practice has influenced US models for producing and

presenting this form. This analysis has served to provide context and background as I begin to address how organizational models, goals, considerations, limitations and contexts impact the development of TVY in the coming chapters.

## Chapter Two: *Organizational Structures*

### Defining Organizational Structures

The three TVY development processes I engaged in as part of my thesis are each situated in a distinct organizational structure. These three organizational structures represent the three most common structures in which TVY is being produced. The three different organizational structures under which I participated in development processes are: a university-centered model with the SPARK! Theatre Ensemble's *Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath* at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin); a professional theatre company model with *The Moon's a Balloon* at Patch Theatre in Adelaide; and a university/professional theatre collaborative model with *The Balloon Project* created as a collaboration between Patch and UT Austin. Each structure provides different support systems, serves diverse stakeholders and looks toward meeting a variety of different goals and intentions.

The university-centered model makes the assumption that typically university theatre departments are not looking towards TVY as a source of income. Financial expectations vary for projects taking place within a university-centered model, with SPARK! there was no expectation of a financial return. Often a university's programming may need to breakeven, but rarely would the focus be for a TVY production to make money. Rather, the emphasis for a university-centered model is placed on experiential learning for those involved in the production. Capturing this idea,

a SPARK! ensemble member wrote in a survey response just before our first performance, “we anticipate learning a lot logistically and artistically. This is very different from many productions I’ve worked on in the past. With Jamie, it’s not about making it to opening night. Instead it’s a constant performance and reflection process” (Attachment SPARK! Survey Sample).

The SPARK! Theatre Ensemble is situated within UT Austin’s Department of Theatre and Dance operating as a student project. As a student project SPARK! is not given a budget, but receives in-kind support such as space, access to prop and costume stock, the ability to offer course credit through an independent study and may receive funding through other avenues (New Works Festival, money allocated from a chair or special fund). To fundraise, SPARK! used the online platform Indiegogo to fund their Fall 2012 programming, enabling them to offer performances free of charge. In a university-centered model TVY is generally seen, at least in part, as a opportunity for young performers and teaching artists to gain experience in understanding, creating and performing for a very young audience. In this sense, the goals and intentions of the work focus on process as well as product, and sometimes even put process or educational value for the student-artists over a desire to please the audience.

Meanwhile a professional theatre company certainly has their sights set on a product that will please audiences at the end of a development process. The artists working for a professional theatre company are paid and expected to come into the development process with a level of experience and expertise matching the position for which they were hired. Income and financing are huge concerns for professional theatre



companies, especially those in the US who receive little to no governmental assistance, so creating a high quality product that will sell tickets is a necessity in this organizational structure. This is not to say that money drives the artistic process, nor that professional theatre companies expect a big financial return on their productions. Rather it is necessary to recognize that professional theatre companies are a business, and they can only continue to develop TVY if they have the money to do so.

Patch Theatre Company's latest work *The Moon's a Balloon* represents the development process of a professional theatre company in my thesis. Patch is located in Adelaide, Australia and receives part of its funding through the Australian government by way of the Australia Arts Council and Arts SA (Supporting Patch Theatre Company into the Future, PDF). The availability of substantial governmental funding for the arts is a key difference between Australia, Europe and the US. While many in the US would argue that this governmental funding strengthens the arts abroad, it's important to note philanthropy for the arts is far lower abroad than in the US. Patch's artistic director Dave Brown explains that the funding Patch receives from the government requires them to adhere to a variety of different mandates as they create arts programming. One of these mandates frowns upon tying theatre to the school curriculum, a prevalent practice in the US that is often required for US companies to receive grant or government funding. Patch can lose their funding if they fail to "innovate and find ways to push the envelope" in making theatre, but in doing this, Patch must also please audiences so the company continues to sell tickets ("Dave Brown Guest Lecture"). So while Patch receives more

governmental funds for their work than most theatres in the US, this does not exempt them from answering to stakeholders and mandates, or writing funding proposals.

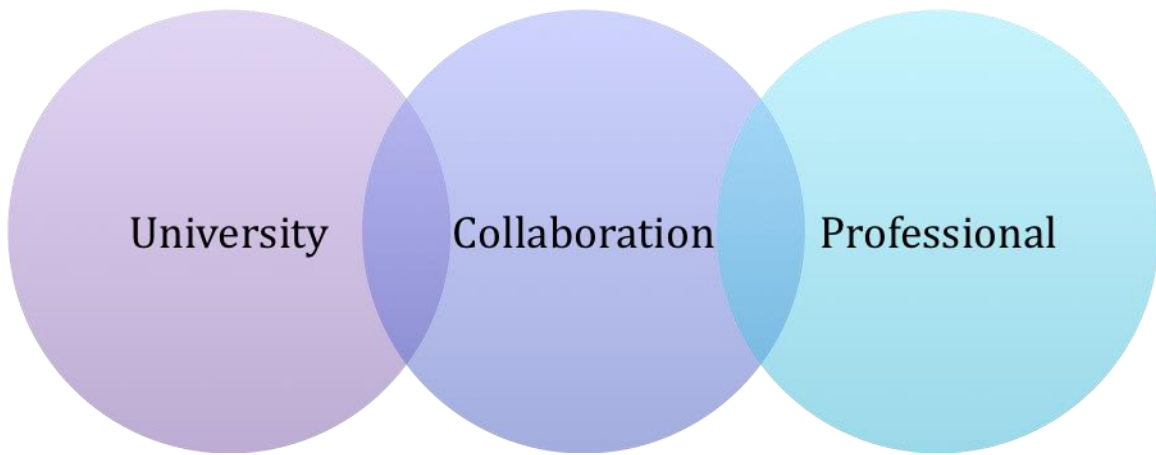
When referring to a collaboration between a professional theatre company and another organization, in this case a university, I use the term collaborative model. Generally the collaborative model refers to two or more organizations that come together to create a piece. This may happen, as it did in the early days of US TVY, because one company has a specialized knowledge or skill that another company desires to learn from. Money can also be a driving factor in collaborations. In the US, companies often collaborate in order to pool together resources to support a new work. *The Balloon Project* is an example of a collaborative model project aimed to support UT Austin students working alongside a professional theatre company, as well as the development of a continuing exchange between UT Austin and practitioners in Adelaide, Australia.

*The Balloon Project* was a theatrical collaboration between UT Austin and Patch Theatre Company exploring theatre-making using the artistic model of Patch Theatre to create a highly sophisticated visual theatre piece for children three to eight years old. Alongside the performance there was a roundtable discussion on the early arts, as well as workshops designed to explore how drama-based instruction can be used to extend the audience experience. The idea behind this project was to create a high quality TVY performance where university students were able to learn about Patch Theatre's artistic model. In turn, the students would offer some insight into how the Patch performance might extend the production to engage audience members and schools through pre- and post- show activities. In this case, Patch's artistic director Dave Brown brought his

artistic process of visual theatre-making to the US and representatives from UT Austin shared their knowledge of drama-based instruction and community engagement, thus allowing for this collaboration to be an exchange of skills. This exchange created an interesting dynamic in terms of bringing together the stakeholders, goals and intentions from two different organizational structures to create a cohesive project where everyone was united by a common focus.

Below is a visual representation of how projects developed under a collaborative model experience overlap with both the university-centered model and the professional theatre model. This visual representation depicts a collaboration between a university and a professional theatre company, as was the case for *The Balloon Project*. For *The Balloon Project* stakeholders included UT Austin faculty, staff and students along with Dave Brown and the staff of Patch. Within identifying these stakeholders it is important to note that some stakeholders had more influence on the design and implementation for this project than others. Since Brown was traveling to UT Austin, he served as the main stakeholder on behalf of Patch while Patch's managing director also had a significant influence on how the project developed since she handled the financial and logistical arrangements. At UT Austin Brant Pope, the chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance, worked alongside the faculty and staff as well as myself during development of the project putting logistical and artistic resources in place to support the project, while I took the lead during implementation of the project as co-director for *The Balloon Project*. In addition to diverse stakeholders we worked to bring together goals and intentions that each individual organization brought to *The Balloon Project*. In working to bring together

the goals and intentions of each party, which I will detail later in this chapter, new combined goals and intentions emerged represented below by the piece of the collaborative model that does not overlap with either the university-centered model or professional theatre model.



**Figure 1:** Diagram of Organizational Structures

Above I have laid out the stakeholders, financing structures and basic goals for TVY under each organizational structure. As I move forward I will more closely examine the organizations and development processes and how goals and intentions were set for each development process. In looking at development through the lens of these three main organizational structures I have already named some key differences underlying the development of each piece, mainly the burden to make money and the question of

whether the artistic team is focusing more heavily on the process of creation (mainly considering the experience of the artists) or investing in the product (mainly considering the experience of the audience).

### **Background Information on Key Organizations**

While the development processes examined within this thesis represent the three most common structures in which TVY is being produced, the projects chosen are not necessarily representative of the field at large. Each of the projects featured in this thesis links to UT Austin. The SPARK! Theatre Ensemble is run out of the Department of Theatre and Dance, while both my trip to Adelaide to observe Patch's development for *The Moon's a Balloon* and *The Balloon Project* were organized through UT Austin's Department of Theatre and Dance as they look towards establishing future collaborations with Adelaide, Australia. Below is a piece of the rationale shared with faculty and staff of the Department of Theatre and Dance around the exchange with Patch:

The University of Texas at Austin Department of Theatre and Dance seeks to provide a place for emerging artists to pursue their passion by collaborating with a diverse community of Artists... Adelaide, Australia is unique in that it houses three internationally recognized theatres focused solely on creating work for youth. These theatres are: Patch Theatre Company, Windmill Theatre and Slingsby. Each of these theatres has a unique approach to creating work for youth and feature diverse aesthetics in their work. The MFA program in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities, specifically through their work in drama-based instruction (DBI), positions UT Austin for an exchange with artists in Adelaide who are interested in gaining a greater awareness of the multiple uses of DBI and how they may use DBI to strengthen their community engagement. This interest in gaining from each other's expertise sets the stage for a unique opportunity to engage in a reciprocal exchange that opens opportunities for students and faculty throughout the department.

(Corey. "What is Visual Theatre?")

For the purposes of this thesis I chose to focus on three projects each representing a distinct structure so I could provide an in-depth analysis of each development process. In the future I hope to have the opportunity to perform similar analysis of the work being created by practitioners within the US, as well as the ability to research TVY in a variety of different forms.

### **SPARK! Theatre Ensemble**

Shortly after I entered the University of Texas at Austin MFA program in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities, a call for project proposals for *The 2011 University Co-op presents the Cohen New Works Festival* (New Works) was announced. New Works seeks to serve as an incubator for projects that are innovative and original. I decided to use this opportunity to combine my newly acquired passion for visual theatre with my love of small children. Having worked in early childhood arts education for several years prior to graduate school, I had knowledge of child development and felt confident that I could make this combination work. So I submitted a New Works proposal and created my first piece of TVY, *HANDS (HANDS)*.

Following the creation of *HANDS*, I attended the Imagine Festival and the ASSITEJ World Congress both of which hosted TVY pieces. While there, I saw over a dozen TVY performances ranging from storytelling to scripted works and puppetry to interactive engagements. One of the most memorable performances was an unconventional installation piece where the audience followed a tiny toy hamster down a tube finally ending up in a space where a giant hamster stood in a boat and played guitar.

The sheer whimsy of this piece as well as the unexpected visuals kept me wondering what would happen next, although I do question what the intentions behind this piece were. I would also be curious to know how young audience members responded to the piece as I viewed the piece with an audience largely composed of adults attending the festival. Alongside seeing performances, I also engaged in TVY master classes offered through Small Size. The series of master classes offered by Small Size brought together directors from different theatres in the network to take participants through a piece of the development process they used to create TVY. The opportunity to see a wide range of TVY pieces and engage with practitioners from around the world helped open my mind to the many possibilities that existed in TVY.

Returning to UT Austin after a summer of exploring TVY abroad I started a theatre ensemble. SPARK! Theatre ensemble (SPARK!) was created in August 2011 with myself as artistic director and fellow graduate student, Meg Greene as assistant director. A mother who had brought her child to *HANDS* connected me to the Austin Children's Museum explaining she wanted her son to be able to experience the arts from a young age so she would love to see us continue making TVY someplace where we would have a built-in audience. The Austin Children's Museum worked with SPARK! to create a residency at the museum where we held 15-minute 'interactive storytelling' performances once a month. In exchange, Austin Children's Museum provided us a venue, marketing and guaranteed audience of children under the age of three.

The residency at The Austin Children's Museum proved to be a valuable research space for our ensemble. Greene and I began each short 'interactive storytelling'

performance with a question or focus that allowed us to gain knowledge of how a very young audience reacted to different elements of theatre. Each month we worked with our ensemble of undergraduate actors (a group of four to eight actor/facilitators), training them to facilitate interactive moments with very young children and devising short plays around research questions. Our questions looked at how the child audience would react to different elements in a production such as: types of puppetry or music; prop distribution; and uses of language or modes of communication (dialogue, narration, movement without dialogue). As the months went by we wanted to try our performances with more than one child audience so we partnered with the University of Texas Child Development Center (UTCDC) and began bringing our ‘interactive storytelling’ performances to their classes as well. The two sites offered us the opportunity to look at family audiences, as well as children attending with a class of their peers. Additionally the UTCDC allowed us to look at how child audience members responded to performances by age, as we would perform for the classes with only one age group attending each performance. Then in Spring 2012, we showcased workshop productions of two original pieces of TVY. Greene and I each created and produced a 30-40 minute scripted, interactive performance for an invited family audience. Following the workshops, we raised money to fund larger productions that could tour into preschools the following year. Additionally, the ensemble devised and workshopped a new piece, *In My Own Backyard*, with Trike Theatre in Arkansas over the summer of 2012 (*In My Own Backyard*). This workshop brought Greene and I to Trike Theatre to work alongside a few of their artists to further develop a new piece of TVY.



## **Patch Theatre Company**

Patch Theatre Company (Patch) of Adelaide, South Australia was founded in 1972, Patch creates visual theatre performances designed for four to eight-year-olds and their families. Over the past forty years, Patch has presented over 100 performances serving more than 1.6 million audience members. Patch's performances tour throughout Australia and all over the world. According to artistic director Dave Brown, playing off Pablo Picasso's famous quote, "Every child is an artist; the challenge is to keep them so" Patch's goal is to "keep the artist alive in every child" (Patch Theatre Website). Patch's use of visual theatre allows them to create 'open narratives', visual theatre pieces that are open to interpretation, which are often devised using a limited pallet of objects allowing the pieces to be 'elegantly simple' ("Dave Brown Guest Lecture"). The open narratives created by visual theatre allow for meaning-making by the intended age group of four to eight-year-olds who Brown believes are in the prime age of imagination and possibility.

Dave Brown began his career as an educator teaching chemistry, biology, english and drama for just under 15 years. In the early nineties, Brown became Patch's artistic director. After seven years he left to work in drama education at Carclew Arts Center. Shortly after Brown left Patch, the company lost its governmental funding and Patch's board asked Brown to return as artistic director in 2000 (Dave Brown Biography). While at Patch, Brown has helped bring together ideas of whimsy and logic. He has discovered a variety of specific beliefs for TVY and visual theatre including that 42 minutes is the ideal running time for a visual theatre piece for children (Patch Theatre Company Website). When asked why he loves creating theatre for young children Brown replied,

“Children have no preconceptions of what theatre should be, so they are open to all the things theatre can be” (“Dave Brown Guest Lecture”).

### **The University of Texas at Austin Department of Theatre and Dance**

The University of Texas at Austin Department of Theatre and Dance “exists as a diverse educational community of artists and scholars who are committed to excellence in teaching, research, creative practice and service” (Department of Theatre & Dance at The University of Texas at Austin Website). Serving both undergraduate and graduate students, the department offers a variety of courses in acting, design, directing, dance, playwriting, stage management, applied theatre and theatre education. The department hosts a myriad of student and professional productions, new play and dance development workshops, teacher training and research studies focused on the arts. In addition, the department hosts Drama for Schools, a collaborative professional development program that utilizes drama-based instruction, which underpins the work in the theatre education programs. The Graduate Master of Fine Arts in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities (DTYC) program is housed within the Department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin. This program is one of the few graduate programs focusing specifically on drama and theatre for youth in the US.

As UT Austin seeks opportunities for their students to engage in practical programs and is increasingly looking to connect to international practice, the Department of Theatre and Dance continually pursues opportunities for artistic exchange. Brant Pope, chair of the UT Austin Department of Theatre and Dance, met Dave Brown during the

2012 International Performing Arts for Youth (IPAY) conference. Pope worked alongside several DTYC faculty members to begin exploring possibilities for an exchange between UT Austin and arts organizations in Adelaide, Australia. The original interest in Adelaide was in the richness of their tradition in making new work in ‘Theatre for Young People’ (which is commonly referred to as Theatre for Young Audiences or TYA in the US) through several companies in Adelaide. At the same time, Brown became interested in UT Austin’s DTYC program, specifically their work in arts education, community engagement and drama-based instruction. This mutual interest in an exchange opened the opportunity for continuing dialogue between Patch and UT Austin which would eventually evolve, leading up to *The Balloon Project*.

### **A Look into Each Development Process**

Given the unique organizational structure for each of the three projects, the development processes are also each distinct. The process descriptions below will allow for analysis in later chapters. Here, I will name the major steps undertaken within the development of SPARK!’s *Jamie Doesn’t Want to Take a Bath*, Patch’s *The Moon’s a Balloon* and the UT Austin/Patch collaboration *The Balloon Project*. In the next chapter I will examine the goals and intentions of each development process, and identify how these goals and intentions link to intentional design in TVY.

#### ***Jamie Doesn’t Want to Take a Bath* Development**

Spark! Theatre’s development process for *Jamie Doesn’t Want to Take a Bath* (*Jamie*) began in September 2011 when the ensemble first played with the idea of a story

that took place in a bathtub for one of their fifteen minute interactive storytelling performances at the Austin Children's Museum. The initial idea of a performance piece about bath time stemmed from my desire to deal with something familiar to young children given that most children take baths. The ensemble brainstormed ideas, improvised moments using props that related to the story, and finally put the pieces together to create an interactive story. Later that semester, I took the concept for *Jamie* into my Playwriting for Youth class at UT Austin. I completed a version of the script as a final for the class, only to decide I didn't like it. It felt overly complex with an entire segment that took the audience down the drain into a magic world. The interactive storytelling piece about bath time that preceded this script was charming in its simplicity and familiarity. Recognizing the need to simplify, I decided I wanted to start over. So I brought the idea back to the ensemble to play with and drafted several versions of the script. In April 2012 we put up a workshop production of a new script that followed a more realistic and linear storyline. My desire to create a realistic and linear story for *Jamie* aligned with my knowledge that preschoolers have an understanding of cause and effect and are able to follow a sequence of events that create a simple dramatic structure. In other words, three and four year-olds are gaining pre-literacy skills and can identify the problem within a story. Thus, they can follow a small number of characters as they introduce the problem at the beginning of the story, make attempts to deal with the problem throughout the middle of the story and eventually solve the problem at the end. The attention to the abilities of our target audience in choosing to create a realistic and linear story show one way in which *Jamie* was intentionally designed. Following that

performance I made a few adjustments to the script but it was left largely untouched when we set to work the beginning of September 2012.

At the start of the Fall 2012 semester the ensemble consisted of: Meredyth Pederson and Erica Henderson as actors; Meg Greene as dramaturge and assistant director; Megan Nevels who was excited to be a part of the project but yet to have a designated role. I was in the role of writer/creator/director. The group brought a diversity of experience, with Greene having served as SPARK!'s assistant director the previous year, Henderson as our only undergraduate and a returning SPARK! member, Pederson-a graduate student who brought experience teaching the very young, and Nevels-a graduate student who wrote on her first reflection, "I have never seen a show or been in a production for this young an audience. [I am] so excited to experience it." The diversity of experience with devising and working with the very young created a need for sharing lots of information as we worked, while knowing that in just over seven weeks we were scheduled to begin touring the production into preschools.

We started with a script that was fluid and continued to develop throughout the rehearsal process and as we toured the piece. Our first few rehearsals focused on building a sense of ensemble, gaining a basic understanding of child development through games and movement exercises focused on how children build social and motor skills, as well as playing with different moments from the script. As we began to stage the play and develop the characters, I shared questions I had or problems I saw in the script. Being in the university setting, I felt it was important to openly ponder such issues so that the

ensemble could learn from what I was questioning and so I could benefit from their thoughts.

As the semester progressed, I found myself often challenged by playing so many roles within the production. In my personal notes on October 7, 2012 I admitted to tensions I was feeling about this piece serving as the basis of my thesis project and therefore putting me in the role of creator, director, educator and researcher simultaneously. I note:

I feel a different pressure with my product moving from strictly artistic but informed to a place of spotlight, of being the researcher and someone being looked to inform and create and lead... [I find myself] feeling the need to have things be 'right' and having to remind myself that every moment, every performance, every rehearsal is about learning and growing. (Corey *Field Notes*)

Just after this entry, I solidified the script we used for our performances, agreeing not to make any more major changes because we were edging closer to our first performance. I also began to work with the set designer, an undergraduate student, to create a bathroom out of an 8' x 8' canopy tent so that it could fit into my car for touring. For this production I had my hands in everything from creating the set to booking the tour and researching the ensemble.

With the script set by mid-October we settled into rehearsal mode having cut any direct interaction between the actors and the audience during the performance, and placing Nevels into the role of house manager/facilitator. We landed on a script that ran approximately twenty-five minutes with our house manager engaging audience members before the performance. Then, as the play began, Nevels would invite the audience to join her in actions at select moments in the script later facilitating their movement into smaller

groups to engage in post-show activities with herself and the two actors. After each performance of *Jamie* we would spend a bit of time reflecting and recapping to look at what we might improve as we moved into the next show.

### ***The Moon's a Balloon* Development**

Patch has established a formula for the development of their visual theatre pieces. Each piece is developed over a two year period with four development 'phases' that each last between one to two weeks. The development for each piece starts with a 'germinal idea' around which the exploration for the piece begins. The 'germinal idea' serves as a foundation or a basis on which the performance will be built. Patch often begins their work by narrowing in on a specific set of objects they will use for their piece, choosing objects that somehow tie into their 'germinal idea'. An example of this is the use of boxes and balls in one of Patch's most well-known works *Emily Loves to Bounce*. In this piece, the 'germinal idea' is the interplay between whimsy and logic. The balls represent whimsy while the boxes reference logic, allowing the performers to build a sophisticated and dynamic piece using a multitude of configurations, sizes and types of boxes and balls. In the case of *The Moon's a Balloon*, the 'germinal idea' was the notion that "all sorts of possibilities lie within a simple thing" (Brown "PROJECT BalloOn"). Based on this idea, the artistic team decided that for this production they would work with a simple pallet of white balloons in a black space.

During the first development phase the artistic team explores the 'germinal idea' and the pallet of a piece is established. Once this occurs, the artistic team engages in an

open exploration. During the exploration process, the traditional roles of theatre as we know them in the US blur and theatre-makers are encouraged to follow their impulses as the full artistic team gathers to play with the objects within their pallet, the ‘germinal idea’ and their own imagination. Brown breaks down the idea of theatre into the simplest ingredients, noting that all one needs is, “a somebody, a something and a somewhere” to build a piece of theatre (Corey *Field Notes* 13 Oct 2012). Much of the second and third development phases continue focusing on the idea of open exploration with theatre-makers literally playing with the objects and ideas of the piece. This open exploration allows for a few key things to occur. First, it asks the theatre-makers involved to follow their impulses and just be, helping the theatre-makers find child-like energy and ideas to bring to the piece. Second, Brown points out that “playing allows [the performers] to find common languages and forms of expression” (Corey *Field Notes* 13 Oct 2012). Finally continually playing and exploring allows the artistic team to gather a lot of different possibilities and avoids anyone “becoming precious” about their ideas being included too early in the process (Corey *Field Notes* 13 Oct 2012).

During the second and third phases of development the theatre-makers engage in a series of exercises that lead into compositional tasks. These tasks are assigned to specific theatre-makers to explore. Finally the outcomes are shared and recorded. The filmed outcomes become the raw material for the ‘script’ or sequence of segments that will be organized during the third phase of development. The third phase includes a workshop of this sequence for an invited audience of both children and adults whose response helps further shape the piece.



Dramaturgy and refinement are the focus of the fourth and final development phase for each of Patch's visual theatre pieces. During this phase of *The Moon's a Balloon* I traveled to Adelaide, Australia. While in Adelaide, I engaged in the process of visual theatre dramaturgy alongside Patch's artistic team for *The Moon's a Balloon*. Visual theatre dramaturgy aims to set a descriptive treatment, pulling the story together through a series of image sequences. Brown feels passionately that visual theatre narratives must remain open enough that audiences are able to make their own meaning, but notes that it is important to determine and refine the story for the artistic team so everyone is working towards the same goal. On the artistic team's blog for *The Moon's a Balloon*, Brown writes to the team about undertaking the task of visual dramaturgy during this phase:

This story is an "interpretation" of the set of "scenes" or "image-plays" we have created through improvisation, provocation and tasks. To date, we have put these scenes together in an order that intuitively seems to make sense. Out of that process came the idea that this was a piece about *how humans make connections and develop relationships through objects*. (Brown *Visual Dramaturgy* 2 Sept. 2012)

Based on this idea, the team moved forward reviewing video footage, setting specific movements and moments within each scene and finding what transitions allowed the scenes to be woven together into one cohesive performance. The fourth development phase included another invited performance, which was followed by a discussion session with adult audience members and a gathering of post-show responses from the child audience who had attended with their school. This phase ended with Brown meeting with the designers to finalize details for the build of the set and design elements so the piece

would be ready to move into a two-week rehearsal period before premiering for public audiences at the 2013 ComeOut Festival<sup>2</sup> in May.

### ***The Balloon Project Development***

*The Balloon Project* was a collaborative theatre-making process bringing Patch's artistic director Dave Brown to create new work at the University of Texas at Austin. The idea behind this project was to engage a team of student-artists in a theatre-making process that used Patch Theatre's devising principles to create a performance based on the concepts used in *The Moon's a Balloon*. A variety of factors including cost, space and the availability of both Brown and the student-artists dictated that the development process for *The Balloon Project* take place over a six-day period. It is important to note, however, that the artistic team, including the directors, designers and stage managers began work on portions of this project far before our week of development at UT Austin began. Due to the relatively short timeframe in which the theatre-makers would be developing this piece, the style, number of segments, music and major design elements were all pre-determined. Items pre-determined were based on elements from Patch's *The Moon's a Balloon* prior to beginning our six-day development process for *The Balloon Project*.

Brown and I served as co-directors for *The Balloon Project*. My main responsibilities included the coordination of the logistical framework in Austin, while Brown set the artistic framework from afar. A key to our success in coordinating the project lay in the fact that both Brown and I spent time in each other's spaces prior to this

<sup>2</sup> Begun in 1974, ComeOut Festival is South Australia's "preeminent arts festival for schools and families" according to their website.

collaboration. Brown had a working knowledge of UT Austin's available resources and I had a knowledge of Patch's *The Moon's a Balloon* development process. This general understanding across the two sites allowed us to share ownership over the piece. We were able to speak a common language and compromise on different aspects of the project. We entered this collaboration with an agreement that *The Balloon Project* would not simply be a re-staging of *The Moon's a Balloon*, but rather it would bring together a team of student-artists to engage in the process of open exploration that Patch uses to build their visual theatre pieces. This openness empowered Brown and me, as co-directors, to trust that, as the piece shifted with each decision made, that ultimately the piece would come together during our development week as we created based off of what was in the room and inspired us in the moment. For me, this openness eliminated the fear that I was making the wrong choice or that Brown, while ultimately leading the process artistically, was my superior. Ultimately I was able to fully own my role as co-director.

About one month before *The Balloon Project* development week, the designers, stage managers and I gathered for a Skype meeting with Brown. Our meeting set the tone for the rapid collaborative development process we would embark upon just after winter break. We discussed how this process would blur the traditional roles we typically see in US theatre. Instead, our process focused on ensuring all collaborators felt welcome to be involved with warm-ups and exploration exercises involving our major props, the balloons. One stage manager reflected upon the blurring of roles, explaining that she felt everyone was welcome to engage in all aspects of the performance when they felt compelled while also keeping their eye on the tasks that fell under their job description.

This led to one of our stage managers performing in the final scene, our projection artist joining in warm-ups, Brown sweeping the stage and me singing during the opening of the show. Meredyth Pederson, a performer in *Jamie* served as a stage manager for *The Balloon Project*. She explained, “At this intersection of all my previously distinct artistic lenses, I discovered a new artistic identity for myself: theatre maker,” referencing the term Brown gives to artists involved in Patch’s process (Pederson).

One week before Spring semester classes began a team of ten student-artists joined Brown and me in UT Austin’s Oscar Brockett Theatre. With the projectors hung and a set of basic balloons inflated we quickly set off in exploring the movement of the balloons. Over the first four days of rehearsals, we explored different types of balloons, using some of the exercises used during the development of *The Moon’s a Balloon*. We started by allowing the theatre-makers to play with one set-up of balloons, coaching them to pay attention to the aesthetics of their balloon and how it reacted to movement. Next, Brown or I gave the theatre-makers a ‘compositional task,’ asking them to set movements and perform what they found to be interesting for the larger group. As the pieces were shared, we filmed them and the whole group had the opportunity to respond to what they saw. As we gathered ideas from these short performances, Brown and I assigned theatre-makers to work on different segments, naming someone to ‘direct’ that segment. The segment director was sometimes Brown or me, and other times it was one of the theatre-makers involved in performing that segment. Once the segment was somewhat set, we layered in the music from *The Moon’s a Balloon* and performed it for the rest of the group

who served as a critical eye. The viewer would often then take over directing the piece and work with the performers to troubleshoot any problems they were having.

As we moved into the final two days of development everyone shifted into more traditional theatrical roles with the projection artist stationed at his computer programming the projection sequence, the performers onstage or backstage rehearsing, the stage managers preparing balloon configurations and Brown and I taking on more traditional directorial roles. We ordered the segments, considered how they transitioned, made changes to pieces to add consistency to the story arc, and set both the opening and closing segments for the performance.

We ultimately held one workshop performance, bringing in an estimated one hundred and twenty audience members, a mix of children and adults from UT Austin and the Austin community. While the performance lacked some of the refinement that comes with weeks of dramaturgy and rehearsal, I was truly amazed by how visually stunning and engaging the performance was with only a six-day development process. The opening and closing segments featured live music with improvised lyrics and ukulele accompaniment that provided a warm welcome and an invitation to explore the space. Next in transitioning to the theatre space an eight foot white balloon appeared seemingly moving on it's own. This oversized balloon appeared throughout the show, alongside white balloons of differing sizes, textures and configurations. In the final segment within the theatre space the giant balloon serves as the base for a projection light show that was visually stunning. This accomplishment was certainly made possible by bringing together elements already established by Patch's *The Moon's a Balloon*, as well as the frameworks

established by the artistic team prior to beginning development. *The Balloon Project* served to provide student-artists an opportunity to explore using Patch's visual theatre model with the end-goal being a performance that would engage the UT Austin community with a visual theatre performance designed for three to eight-year-olds. Following *The Balloon Project* faculty members from majors across the Department of Theatre and Dance approached me with compliments and inquiries about the process and product. This serves to demonstrate that *The Balloon Project* engaged the UT Austin community to begin dialogue about visual theatre and TVY. In terms of the student-artists, many wrote blog posts detailing how the project has positively impacted them as theatre-makers. Additionally three students from *The Balloon Project* performed in a TVY piece the following semester, two of whom, engaged with TVY for the first time during *The Balloon Project*.

In this chapter, I introduced the organizational structures defining each of the three structures and naming key goals, considerations and stakeholders for each. I provided background information on the organizations and individuals' key to understanding the development processes explored within this thesis. Finally I provided a description of each development process, thus setting the stage for the upcoming chapters where I will analyze each development process's form, goals and intentions. I will also explore how form, goals, intentions and organizational structures impact the role of the audience and collaborators in TVY.

## Chapter Three: *Goals and Intentions*

### Defining Goals and Intentions

Throughout my thesis I look at intentional design in TVY. I use the term intentional design to define a practice where the theatre-makers account for the developmental, social and emotional needs of a very young audience. As I have studied and observed the development of TVY, I have seen multiple ways of creating work that incorporate a knowledge and understanding of the child audience. Intentional design can be seen when an artistic team takes the time to research their target audience and displays a consistent effort, either throughout their process or at specific intervals, to assess the impact of their artistic choices on their audience. This suggests that intentionally designed TVY is audience-centered as opposed to artist-centered. As we move into looking at the intentions and goals of the development processes I engaged in, a tension exists. While intentional design is employed in all three processes, both *Jamie* and *The Balloon Project* sought to find a balance between being artist-centered and audience-centered. This tension stems from the fact that these two processes have intentions and goals to serve both the student-artists and the audience, whereas *The Moon's a Balloon* primarily focused on serving the audience.

The words goal and intention are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of my thesis I use these terms with two distinct meanings. I define intention as a course of action one aims to follow in developing their work. In the case of developing TVY, an artist may have the intention to work a certain way as he or she develops work to meet a specific goal. I define goals as a desired result one plans and commits to achieve that can

be evaluated, a desired end-point in a TVY development process or phase that is measurable. I do not mean to say that a goal must necessarily be formally assessed, but rather that it is assessable in some way. For example, while I may not formally document the exact percentage of children who participate in interactive moments during a performance, I can informally state how engaged the child audience is from my observations and therefore note how effective a piece is in meeting the goal of engaging the audience.

The three TVY development processes I engaged in featured distinct and overlapping intentions. These stemmed largely from differing goals that were in some way influenced by the organizational structure in which each project was developed. While each company looked to intentionally design their work for a very young audience, the theatre-makers approached this task in different ways. *Jamie* was intended to engage an audience of children two to four years old, largely experiencing the performance at their schools. With *Jamie*, SPARK! also set out to create a believable and relatable narrative performance that involved moments of interactive engagement. *The Moon's a Balloon* aimed to create an 'elegantly simple' and highly sophisticated visual theatre piece that was open-ended to allow for the child audience to engage in meaning-making. The university-professional theatre collaboration with *The Balloon Project* looked to create an open-ended visual theatre piece based on *The Moon's a Balloon* while adding interactive engagement for the child audience in the lobby before and after the show.

Next is a chart naming some of the main intentions and goals for each of the three projects, identifying the intentions and goals linked to the role of collaborators, focus of



the process and form of TVY for each project. The focus of the process refer to the main objective for each development process, helping to identify the artist-centered versus audience-centered elements in each development process/performance. The chart shows that even overlaps in intention do not necessarily lead to the same specific goal. It is important to note that while writing this thesis, *The Moon's a Balloon* was still in development. When I visited Patch, I experienced the final phase of their creative development period. In light of this, I write of the goals and intentions as stated to me during my visit to Adelaide in October 2012. It is important to consider that as *The Moon's a Balloon* evolves the goals and intentions may shift. Additionally I am unable to determine if Patch was able to meet their goals as their piece has not yet completed development and begun public performances.

### Role of Collaborators

<u>Production</u>	<u>Intentions</u>	<u>Goals</u>
<b>SPARK! Theatre Ensemble</b> <i>Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath</i>	Shared Artistic Ownership	To empower the ensemble to give ideas, make choices and help tour the performance
<b>Patch Theatre Company</b> <i>The Moon's a Balloon</i>	Shared Artistic Ownership	To engage all artists in vision, creating a high quality cohesive piece
<b>UT Austin &amp; Patch Theatre Collaboration</b> <i>The Balloon Project</i>	Shared Artistic Ownership	To co-produce a work and encourage the blurring of traditional theatre roles

### Focus of the Process

<u>Production</u>	<u>Intentions</u>	<u>Goals</u>
<b>SPARK! Theatre Ensemble</b> <i>Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath</i>	Train skilled actor/facilitators	To shift ensemble members' definitions of TVY
<b>Patch Theatre Company</b> <i>The Moon's a Balloon</i>	Create a performance that entertains	To gain acclaim for artistic excellence and bring in large audiences
<b>UT Austin &amp; Patch Theatre Collaboration</b> <i>The Balloon Project</i>	Train skilled actor/facilitators	To help the ensemble gain an understanding of Patch's Process

### Form of TVY

<u>Production</u>	<u>Intentions</u>	<u>Goals</u>
<b>SPARK! Theatre Ensemble</b> <i>Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath</i>	Relatable and Realistic Narrative with child audience participation	An opportunity for child audience members to demonstrate agency, engage and reflect
<b>Patch Theatre Company</b> <i>The Moon's a Balloon</i>	Highly sophisticated Visual Theatre piece	An open-ended performance centered on a theme that allows for meaning-making
<b>UT Austin &amp; Patch Theatre Collaboration</b> <i>The Balloon Project</i>	Highly sophisticated Visual Theatre piece with participatory moments	An open-ended performance that allows meaning-making, some narrative providing opportunity to engage

**Figure 2:** Chart of Intentions and Goals

## **Differing Goals and Intentions**

As noted, the role of collaborators, focus of the process and form of TVY varied with each process in which I took part. Within each process, the varied goals and intentions linked to the distinct development styles, different organizational structures and diverse body of both artists and audience members. All of these elements relate to how audience-centered versus artist-centered the process and product for the piece appear. With *The Moon's a Balloon* the theatre-makers' focus is mainly on the end product. The development process focused on creating a piece that will please the audience. This allowed the focus for both the development and the performance to remain audience-centered. In both *Jamie* and *The Balloon Project* there was a split focus with the process aimed at teaching the artists how to engage a very young audience when they present their product. This caused tension for me as a practitioner as I sought to find a balance between being artist-centered and audience-centered in both the process of development and through performance.

## ***Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath* Goals and Intentions**

*Jamie* placed me in a unique position as I served as the creator, director and researcher for this project. When student-artists first become members of the SPARK! Theatre ensemble they sign a memorandum of agreement that states the project creator/director owns the intellectual property created during SPARK! rehearsals. In exchange for the student-artists' work devising and performing in SPARK!, the project creator/director agrees to provide appropriate training and education to further the

student-artists' understanding of and ability to engage with very young audiences (Attachment 2: SPARK! Memorandum of Agreement). With this agreement in place, *Jamie* left me walking a fine line in wanting to create the highest quality product for the preschool audiences we would perform for, while also acknowledging my commitment to training the involved actors. This sometimes meant letting the actors struggle, a critical step to becoming better actor/facilitators, and fighting my urge to jump in and fix moments of facilitation. Additionally, in taking on the role of researcher for this project I became fascinated by tracking the emerging/shifting definitions and understanding of TVY and views on very young children held by the student-artists. However, I struggled to teach the student-artists about TVY and very young audiences without imposing too many of my own ideas about the pieces we were developing as an ensemble.

SPARK! was created as a theatre ensemble based in the idea that our artistic products would benefit from shared investment in the pieces we created and a group of people thinking up ideas as opposed to one artist working alone. It was my intention to foster shared artistic ownership as we create, so our development style for *Jamie* began with group devising. I realized soon after we began that each ensemble member needed to be empowered to make choices and give ideas about how to handle moments of interactivity because with very young audiences unpredictable things happen. I recognized that if the performers didn't feel ownership over the script to improvise, they would lose the ability to adapt to each audience's unique needs. One of the ensemble members described their experience as an actor in *Jamie* after an October rehearsal via a survey response that reads, "I am really enjoying the process so far because rehearsal

feels like a test lab for the script. Each time we try something new it feels really purposeful and we learn something new about the piece each time” (“SPARK! Reflection Response”). While striving to be collaborative and empower the artists involved in SPARK! I also recognize that I hold some of the ‘expert knowledge’ both as the creator/director and because of my experience in TVY and ECE. This created and continues to create an inherent hierarchy within the ensemble. Ultimately as the creator/director I did claim a certain ownership over *Jamie* and had the final say on any decisions made. In this sense while my intention was to create share investment of *Jamie* I came to realize that while my original intention was to create shared ownership over the piece this would not be feasible.

While I committed to creating an intentionally designed TVY piece to tour into preschools, the desired outcome for ensemble members is that after spending a semester working with SPARK! they would be trained to perform for and facilitate with very young children. My goal was to shift ensemble members’ understanding of TVY and their ideas about the capabilities of young children. Unlike a professional theatre company which typically hires artists who have demonstrated their abilities both in their art form and in working with young children prior to working on a TVY piece, in the university model, I look for desire and potential to become a TVY theatre-maker when seeking ensemble members, regardless of experience. As members came into the SPARK! ensemble with a varied level of experience, I needed to explain why I was making shifts in a scene or why a question needed to be phrased a certain way to provide ensemble members an understanding of child development and intentional design within

TVY. With *Jamie* this often meant taking a lot of time to explain and analyze each moment within the script. One of the ensemble members noted the benefits of working this way responding to the survey: “taking time to discuss why choices should be made has been an experience that I wish I could have in the development of other productions. The process of developing this piece so far has been all about discovery” (“SPARK! Reflection Response”). Additionally, I needed to fight the urge to jump in when one of the ensemble members struggled during an interaction with a child audience member. While the creator/director side of me wanted to ‘fix’ whatever the situation was to allow the child audience the best experience possible as an educator, I knew that I needed to let the ensemble member work through the challenge then talk with them later to identify different ways to handle a similar situation should it occur during future performances.

The struggles the ensemble sometimes faced with facilitation were unique to the type of performance we chose for *Jamie*. My intention was for the production to be a realistic and relatable narrative for our preschool audience. To facilitate this, our performance was designed to provide children opportunities to exercise agency through interactive engagements during the performance and the chance to reflect alongside the performers following the play. The intention to create a realistic and relatable narrative called for a great deal of dramaturgical discussions, both in my asking children questions that related to the performance to gather ideas as research for the piece and later with some lengthy conversations in the rehearsal room. Naming the intention for our performance, the assistant director/dramaturge shared her thoughts on a survey given during an ensemble meeting writing, “I hope it’s relatable and real. I hope audiences

actively participate and learn something new” (“SPARK! Reflection Response”). As we worked to create a realistic performance for *Jamie*, at times I worried we lost the whimsy and play in the story, as sometimes the character Jamie just seemed like brat. My own notes from October 7, 2012 reflect my fear that with our focus split between creating a realistic piece and on ensemble training that we were losing the fun in the performance. I wrote, “The theatre-makers in this process need to play, how can my actors and my team encourage others to play (which is such a big goal of my work) if they themselves are not given that time and space?” (Corey *Field Notes*). The tension caused by trying to meet so many needs during one development process was at times overwhelming for me.

Ultimately once performances began, I was able to see how *Jamie*’s intentional design allowed child audience to engage and reflect, how the ensemble members were empowered to take ownership as they demonstrated their willingness to make choices when things didn’t go as planned and how the ensemble members were able to grow and learn throughout the process. The undergraduate who played Jamie in this production showed her ownership of the piece and an emerging respect for TVY in her final reflection stating, “My goals for this production are to have an honest performance and to tell a story that the audience can connect to, no matter how old they are. The fact that these are goals I have for non-TVY productions show how TVY shows are just as valuable and important” (“SPARK! Reflection Response”). Statements like these demonstrated the shifts in ensemble ideas on the capabilities of young children and TVY over the course of the semester. Other responses commented on surprising encounters with individual children, positive reactions from educators and how performing in the

piece impacted the ensemble members as teachers and as artists. This particular statement further speaks to the commitment and ownership this ensemble member felt for *Jamie* demonstrating that I was able to foster a shared investment in the piece by ensemble members.

### ***The Moon's a Balloon* Goals and Intentions**

*The Moon's a Balloon* focused on the use of collective dramaturgy among all theatre-makers. Brown names that collective dramaturgy ensures all artists involved in the development of a piece are engaged and helps everyone be 'on the same page' about what the work is and needs to be (Corey *Field Notes* 19 Jan 2013). The intention to create shared ownership over a theatre piece is far more complex for a professional theatre than an educational institution, because as money becomes part of the conversation, legal issues around intellectual property and payment come into play. Professional theatres must consider the legal and financial implications of shared ownership of a piece of theatre, ensuring their contracts explicitly state the terms for ownership and any income generated with everyone involved in the creation of a new piece. With the development of *The Moon's a Balloon*, shared artistic ownership supports the goal of each artist working on a piece and having input into the end product. To accommodate this goal artists are contracted for all phases of the development and are promised the first offer to work on subsequent performances of a piece they co-develop. Brown explained during the development for *The Moon's a Balloon* that the exercises, explorations and compositional tasks that the artists undertook during the development



process for the show were, “not meant to inform the style of the piece. It is the style. This is the show” (Corey *Field Notes* 14 Oct 2012). This quote demonstrates how open exploration and initial movement sequences build into becoming the performance, the time spent playing with props and ideas not only contribute to the final piece but are continually refined to become part of the final product. Brown went on to explain that in his process artists involved in the initial development of any piece understand the ‘performance language’ in a different way than artists who step into a show later because they created it. This cued me to the idea that when creating TVY and seeking shared investment from an ensemble, it is also worthwhile to invest in artists who can commit to seeing a project through its full development. Continually changing artists may lead to a disconnect between the established material and its intended purpose, additionally artists new to a project generally take a significant amount of time to gain familiarity with the flow and build of a piece.

*The Moon’s a Balloon* was created following Patch’s process of exploration around an initial prompt or idea. Brown as the director for this piece positioned himself mainly as a facilitator in rehearsals seeing his job in early stages of development to set parameters then allow the artists to explore within those parameters. This was done with the intention of creating shared artistic ownership among all collaborators. As the development of *The Moon’s a Balloon* progressed, Brown showed the performers videotaped pieces of earlier exercises he found particularly interesting. The team talked about these videos and then tried to recreate moments they liked. Then, upon coming to the end of a section that was set, the performers were frequently given the opportunity to

decide what they would do next or how they might transition into a segment. This process valued trying multiple ideas. While working through a process, the artists began by exploring ideas, then set sections of movement and finally layered on characters and plot. There was much dialogue and compromise within this process as the artists explored what was possible. At moments the performers were told that music could be re-composed to fit a section, while during another piece the performers were asked to adapt their movement to fit what had already been composed. This type of collaboration created an open environment where everyone was asked to contribute to the piece and in various moments they had to shift their thinking to help meet the goal of creating a cohesive performance. During the design meeting that followed the workshop performance of *The Moon's a Balloon* Brown explained that while the process looked towards a goal of shared artistic ownership he ultimately needed to ensure a cohesive piece was created.

Ensuring a cohesive piece is crucial for Patch. A major goal of *The Moon's a Balloon* was financial and artistic success. One of the ways Patch works to ensure the success of their work is to engage both artists and audience members to respond to early workshops on each visual theatre piece. As early as the first development phase Patch employs a “provocator” (Corey *Field Notes* 18 Jan 2013). A provocator is an artist who comes in at specific intervals during a development process to serve as an outside eye-providing feedback on what they see in specific sections and questioning the work. The provocator is empowered to suggest changes to the piece while they are in rehearsals, which the director and other theatre-makers may later choose to implement or ignore. In addition to the provocator, audiences are invited to attend workshop performances during

the development of a new work and offer feedback. While consistency in the core artistic team has advantages when seeking shared investment as theatre-makers are able to develop alongside the piece, employing an outside artist can allow new perspectives and ideas to be brought to a piece. These outside suggestions can be helpful, particularly in finding solutions to problems one is encountering as they develop new work.

For *The Moon's a Balloon* I attended a workshop performance with two classrooms of preschool children. Brown shared that during workshop performances he listens for the questions and comments children make during the performance, as well as reading their body language to see where they are engaged and where they may be losing interest. The children were later led through some post-show activities to help identify their favorite moments from the piece. In addition to the child audience, a 'critical appraisal committee,' made up of professional artists and parents, attended. This committee is typically invited to "provocatively analyze" the performance, offering suggestions for the piece (Corey *Field Notes* 19 Jan 2013). When I attended the post-show discussion Patch held with their critical appraisal committee, Brown questioned the group asking, "what needs to happen next?" while the committee analyzed and offered feedback on gender roles, the character relationship and the overall build within the piece (Corey *Field Notes* 17 Jan 2013). By soliciting feedback from children, parents, educators and artists as a piece is developing Patch has the opportunity of testing the reception a piece receives prior to public performances. The audience response and feedback from the critical appraisal committee serve to help them trial performances to

hear outside interpretations helping the company to gain a sense of how financially and successfully artistic a piece may be.

Patch's overall mission is to create highly sophisticated visual theatre that engages children four to eight years old. With *The Moon's a Balloon*, like many of Patch's pieces, Brown strives to be open-ended enough to allow opportunities for meaning-making and varied interpretations among the audience members. Brown explains that while creating theatre pieces, he trusts that if he finds a moment interesting and engaging, an audience will as well ("Dave Brown Guest Lecture"). Brown recalled that in response to an earlier piece of theatre Patch created, *Theo and the Lion*, adult audience members sometimes struggled to understand the piece while children would leave the performance being able to tell the whole story. This demonstrates how sometimes theatre designed specifically for young children, can fail to engage adult audiences. Both Brown and Patch company member Tim Overton name the willingness to imagine and play as why children four to eight years old are Patch's target age group. Overton also notes that children this age "acknowledge small moments" and "see everything," stating that as a performer, he knows how a show is going because "kids will tell you what is funny and what's boring. [At this age] it's healthy for kids to respond" (Overton). At Patch they subscribe to open-ended visual theatre, claim that their theatre helps to 'keep the artist alive in the child' referencing a quote by Pablo Picasso (Patch Theatre Company Website).

### ***The Balloon Project Goals and Intentions***

As an artist enters any artistic process, there are things one knows and things one is hoping to discover through the work. While the artistic team strived for shared artistic ownership of *The Balloon Project*, one of the project's main goals was for the student-artists to engage in the open exploration and process of play that characterize Patch's development process. Unlike *The Moon's a Balloon*, which was developed over the course of two years, *The Balloon Project* was developed in less than one week, so some elements needed to be pre-determined in order to have a product ready for the scheduled performance. The timeline forced Brown and me, as *The Balloon Project* co-directors, to determine how to leave enough space for the artists to explore and create gaining ownership of the piece, and to simultaneously have enough structure and material that we could create a high quality product by the end of our short development process. To accommodate this, Brown settled on which types of balloons would be used and set each balloon section to existing music, which was composed for the corresponding sections in *The Moon's a Balloon*. This allowed for the student-artists to explore the use of different types of balloons, while having the influence of prescribed music to help determine the tone and pace of each segment. Additionally after the student-artist explored movements with each type of balloon and began to set movement sequences for each balloon the student-artists were invited to watch clips of the Australian performers executing segments from *The Moon's a Balloon* to see if they could find any additional movements they would like to try. At times Brown or I would direct segments; in other instances we would step back to let the student-artists plan and create.

Brown and I struggled with how much information or influence we should give the company as we worked. If we gave too little, we risked the theatre-makers feeling lost or ending the project without any understanding of Patch's development process, while too much information and direction could result in a product that lacked shared artistic ownership or that was too heavily based off of *The Moon's a Balloon*. Towards the end of our process one of the student theatre-makers reflected on her experiences on our company blog : "From where we began and where we are now, I could not have imagined and for that I am grateful" (Kent). This entry suggests that we struck an appropriate balance between inviting exploration and providing content for performers to explore.

An added challenge in naming intentions and goals for *The Balloon Project* was the fact that it encompassed many pieces beyond the performance, including a creative development process, guest lectures at UT Austin and workshops focusing on teaching artistry and community engagement. These many pieces also brought together a multitude of stakeholders, each entering the project with differing intentions and goals. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the creative development week and resulting performance, but it is important to note the many pieces of the project because they had an impact on what was created, how it was created and why a public performance was a necessary result of this development process. Looking at the two partnering organizations for this collaboration, it is important to recognize their individual interests, as well as how these interests were combined as goals and intentions were set for *The Balloon Project*.

Patch was interested in establishing, “a project that explores the intersection between performance, artistic exchange and community engagement – as a means of developing deeper relationships with a small number of like-minded communities nationally and internationally” (Brown “PROJECT BalloOn”). UT Austin’s interest lay mainly in exposing students to Patch’s theatre-making process and looking towards the possibility of future artistic and educational exchanges between Adelaide and Austin. With both parties’ interests in mind, the project was structured to have two main parts with the goals and intentions of part one, which encompassed the creative development and performance, mainly focused on providing student-artists training in Patch’s theatre-making process and investing student-artists in co-creating a visual theatre piece.

The performance served as a unifying event that tied together the many pieces of this project. The goals for the performance itself incorporated Patch’s interest through the inclusion of pre- and post-show activities to look at audience engagement. Additionally this performance provided an opportunity to engage the university community by coming together as an audience gaining an understanding of Patch’s work. This public performance aimed to benefit Patch and UT Austin, as both entered this collaboration with an eye towards a continuing exchange.

In addition to artistic work on *The Balloon Project* Brown engaged with students and faculty through meetings and in serving as a guest lecturer. When Brown was a guest artist for UT Austin’s playwrights/directors colloquium, an informal academic discussion for MFA candidates in playwriting and directing with professional artists, following *The Balloon Project* he provided a lot of insight on his experiences working on this

collaboration. At the colloquium, Brown revealed that *The Balloon Project* expected an audience of over one hundred people for the workshop performance. He explained how learning this information shifted his thinking. Because this piece would expose not only the student-artists to Patch's process, but would also introduce the larger university and Austin communities to Patch, this created an added pressure for our performance to be of high artistic quality. In this case, the development of *The Balloon Project* shifted from an artist-centered first half to a more audience-centered second half. This shift could be seen in the process as the student-artists moved from openly exploring at the beginning of the week to a place where the piece was given more outside direction toward the end. Coinciding with this shift, the student-artists moved into more traditional theatre roles as it became clear who was serving as a performer, designer, stage manager, director or working on audience engagement. The shift didn't feel forced; rather there was an assumed agreement that this was what needed to happen for *The Balloon Project* to have a successful performance.

### **Comparing and Contrasting Goals and Intentions**

While the processing had overlapping intentions, they also each had unique characteristics and goals. Within each project, it is interesting to note the tensions that lie between artist-centered and audience-centered intentions and goals, particularly as all three projects intended shared artistic ownership among the artists. I find the overlapping intentions on shared artistic ownership an interesting trend. While each project looked towards different goals in creating shared artistic ownership, the theatre-makers all also



shared a belief that collective dramaturgy gained by the input of all artists collaborating on a piece is important to development. Alongside this, both SPARK! and Patch typically pilot their work by sharing it with young children prior to performances, extending their collective dramaturgy to include their target audience, a practice that many TVY practitioners employ. This idea of collective dramaturgy, and particularly a dramaturgy that includes young children, suggests that intentional design is often not only about a theoretical understanding of the child audience but also about a practical integration of children into the development process. In both the case of the work more heavily focused on actor-training and work prioritizing artistic excellence, the opportunity to interact with child audience members proved an important piece of the development process. Engaging children grounded the performers and the performances through experiencing and responding to the reaction of their target audience while continuing to develop their piece of TVY.

In this chapter, I described and analyzed the goals and intentions for the three processes included as part of my thesis work. I included a chart identifying the intentions and goals linked to the role of collaborators, focus of the process and form of TVY for each project. Next I will look at the many different forms of TVY and then describe and analyze the role of the audience and the role of collaborators in each development process.

## **Chapter Four: *The Many Forms of Theatre for the Very Young***

### **Forms of Theatre for the Very Young**

There are many different types of experiences that are encompassed by my definition of TVY. In my first chapter I define TVY as an umbrella term used to describe theatre intentionally designed to be performed for children under the age of six years, including everything from interactive installations to more traditional proscenium style theatrical performances. This presents the challenge of determining how to distinguish and categorize different types of TVY. For the purposes of this thesis, I distinguish between different types of theatrical experiences by referencing different forms of TVY. A form refers to the type of theatrical piece created. For example, *Jamie* is primarily a narrative performance while *The Moon's a Balloon* and *The Balloon Project* are both primarily visual theatre pieces. Narrative performance is the most common form of theatre in the US, encompassing theatrical pieces primarily told through spoken word. Movement is the central organizing principle in visual theatre. Performers communicate information, relationships and emotions primarily through movement although visual theatre is not necessarily silent or non-verbal. However, the essential meaning of any visual theatre piece transpires through its visual vernacular. Others forms of TVY would include installation, puppet performance, dance and multimedia pieces.

In addition to form, another distinguishing characteristic to help categorize TVY is the level and type of audience engagement within a given piece. The 2011 report

*Getting in on the Act* published by The James Irvine Foundation features a diagram entitled *The Audience Involvement Spectrum*. This diagram depicts “five overlapping stages of involvement” that demonstrate “the nature and extent of the audience member’s involvement in an artistic experience” (Brown and Novak-Leonard 15). In the spectrum, Brown and Novak-Leonard look at how participatory arts experiences shift the role of the audience through setting expectations for audience involvement and offering differing engagement opportunities as part of a performance. While one could apply this spectrum to TVY, many of the examples within the spectrum are not written using the most applicable terms for the engagement of young children. Therefore, in seeking to understand audience engagement in TVY I have modeled after Brown and Novak-Leonard’s audience involvement spectrum to create a spectrum that looks at the role of the audience in TVY. The Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement serves to demonstrate that differing types and levels of participation and engagement are possible with very young children.

### Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement



**Figure 3:** The Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement

Within the Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement, the more active the audience engagement is within a piece of TVY, the more the child audience is empowered to demonstrate agency and impact the theatrical experience. It is not my intention to place a value judgment on whether TVY should seek to have their audience in more active or passive roles but rather to highlight the different roles audience members may play within a TVY piece. Picture a moment where the two characters onstage pick up washcloths moving them on and off of their heads, elbows and knees while an audience of preschoolers, who have also been provided with washcloths, follow along calling out ideas for where to place the washcloths next. Next picture an darken theatre where an audience of preschoolers sit still and silence mesmerized by projections scrolling over an eight foot white balloon. The first picture is of moment from our production of *Jamie*

while the second is a moment within Patch's *The Moon's a Balloon*. In applying this Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement to the three projects outlined in this thesis *Jamie* appears to be the piece with the most active audience engagement while *The Moon's a Balloon* placed audience members in a largely passive role. In both cases the role of audience members links back to the goals and intentions set for the type of performance named for both pieces in chapter three. None of the three processes I engaged in placed audience members in a fully active role, where the audience is called on to co-construct the piece alongside the performers. TVY where audience members are placed in highly active roles require highly skilled actor/facilitators ready to co-create a new performance for each audience, in many cases this is not a practical choice and some would argue it may even border on becoming creative drama or process drama rather than TVY.

An example of a piece that I would classify as highly active in terms of audience engagement is Sally Chance's *This [Baby] Life*, detailed in chapter one. In *This [Baby] Life* performers engage in the practice of 'matching' where they follow and mirror the actions of child audience members placing the audience in a position where they are called to co-create within the performance (Chance). While audience members in *This [Baby] Life* do take on an active role, some may question if the practice of 'matching' used with child audience members under two years of age truly qualifies as co-creation for a performance. I note that while young audience members may not be fully aware of their role in the performance if the child audience was absent there could be no performance. This demonstrates how the child audience in *This [Baby] Life* is necessary

to co-construct a piece that is unique for each performance. Additionally I'd like to note that 'matching' is a developmentally appropriate practice of co-creation within Baby Theatre. This brings to light the idea that when designing TVY it is important for practitioners ensure that interactivity and participation both remain developmentally appropriate and serve a purpose within the piece.

This Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement addresses the existence of many different ways to include the audience in TVY. Next I will analyze the role of the audience in *Jamie*, *The Moon's a Balloon* and *The Balloon Project*. Within each of the three development processes I examine how and why the role of the audience was chosen, how expectations were set so the audience understood their role, and how agency was situated.

### **The Role of the Audience in *Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath***

*Jamie* is the most narrative piece of TVY I have created so far. The earliest stages of exploration I engaged in around a piece that centered around a bathtub were through SPARK!'s monthly performances at The Austin Children's Museum in the Fall of 2011. For these performances Meg Greene, SPARK!'s assistant director, and I would decide what 'research' questions we had for that piece as we set the performance. Early iterations of *Jamie* were interactive storytelling performances entitled *Splish Splash* and *Down the Drain*, these two pieces each had research questions. The Austin Children's Museum served as SPARK!'s lab space to try out different elements, ideas, moments and methods. At these interactive storytelling performances, Greene and I used observation

sheets to note how the audiences reacted to different moments, gathering information on what was successful and how to best move forward in our creative process.

*Splish Splash*, was the first performance SPARK! created, centered on bath time. For this piece, which featured some dialogue, the research questions focused on how music and language (a departure from earlier work that was more largely non-verbal) impacted the performance as well as how the audience would respond to never being invited onto the stage (Attachment 3: Splish Splash Assessment). *Down the Drain*'s research questions focused on how engagement is impacted by delayed audience participation, the use of abstract items and object transformation, and how silent non-verbal action plays within a narrative (Attachment 4: Down the Drain Assessment). Looking back to these early iterations of *Jamie* I can see rooting this piece in narrative, engaging the use of object transformation and including audience participation in a controlled manner have all remained central to the process of creating *Jamie* as all were present in the final product. One of the challenges we found in early workshops of *Jamie* was that narrative performance did not always engage the youngest audience members. Some of the very young children also had trouble with interaction that happened from their seats, standing up to come onto the stage or simply becoming disinterested in the props being distributed to them. Recognizing that this linear story-based work appeared to best engage children two and up. I continued to develop *Jamie* as a Preschool Theatre piece.

As the script was developed for *Jamie*, the written narrative led our rehearsal process. This differed from previous processes the SPARK! ensemble had gone through

in developing pieces where devised movement and improvised dialogue were common. While this performance was more traditionally scripted than my previous TVY, I also wanted to ensure that the piece remained interactive. While a preschool-aged audience can follow a narrative and will sit and listen to be told a story, a child audience of two, three and four-year-olds will be most engaged when they can respond vocally and engage kinesthetically in a story. As a SPARK! ensemble member shared in a survey response, “[The audience was] very engaged and talkative. But they were not disruptive, they were just engaging with the performance. [saying] ‘what is she doing?’ ‘that’s a duck!’.” Preschoolers are working towards the ability to sit quietly and focus. Essentially engaging internally with content as will be expected of children at times as they enter elementary school and as will be expected of them as they experience traditional productions where they are placed in the role of passive audience members. However as the SPARK! ensemble member’s quote illustrates, preschoolers also often feel the need to engage vocally and at times even kinesthetically within a story. This stems from a developmental need to experience in order to learn. Zero to Three, a “national center for infants, toddlers and families,” explains that children between the ages of two and three years old learn best through two way communication and expressing their knowledge to others ("Early Language and Literacy Skills: 24 to 36 Months"). Children in this age group need the opportunity to talk and try things out and with *Jamie* we worked to craft interaction that would allow for this. One example of interaction from *Jamie* is:

**Jamie**

*(Wiggling washcloth)*

Let’s make our washcloths dance!



**Mom**

That's a great idea!

**Jamie**

What else could the washcloths do?

*(Audience can offer suggestions on how the washcloths can move...)*

*(Corey Jamie Pg. 11)*

This moment opened the opportunity for the child audience to engage vocally, giving their ideas on movements for the washcloths that the actors could then integrate into the next piece of the play. Additionally each child audience member had their own washcloth allowing them to engage physically in the actions they had just suggested alongside the actors.

While interactivity was one goal in developing *Jamie*, one particular challenge that arose was how to best facilitate moments of interaction. I struggled as we were rehearsing to determine how to balance a need to tell a cohesive story with providing moments of interaction that were not overly prescriptive. In earlier iterations of *Jamie* the actors broke the fourth wall directly addressing the audience to facilitate activities within the performance. However this was challenging as young audience members didn't necessarily understand when the actors were talking to them and when they were addressing other actors in the scene. During some performances children called out to the characters wanting to engage with the actors outside of the planned interactive moments. Additionally it was challenging to have an adult actress stay in role as the child character of Jamie while facilitating activities and interactive moments. From a dramaturgical standpoint I questioned why Jamie would decide to collect all the washcloths after using

them alongside the audience or how she could remain in character while encouraging a child audience member to go back to their seat. Throughout rehearsals we tried many moments of interaction and ways of facilitating. One SPARK! ensemble member recounts, “We played with different amounts of direct address and audience participation, we landed on having a few moments of interaction within the play.” Ultimately we decided to have the actors avoid direct address during the performance, employing Nevels as the house manager/facilitator to lead a few moments of interaction within the performance. In making this shift the house manager/facilitator would distribute washcloths to the child audience modeling for them how they could follow the actions taking place within the story avoiding the need for Jamie to go into the audience.

*Jamie* continues to be advertised and framed as an “interactive performance” followed by activities facilitated in role by the actors. For me, the reason to include interactive moments is to give children opportunities to exercise agency, to think critically about the story and to engage in creative play based off of elements from the performance. Framing the performance as interactive helped set expectations for the parents and schools who were considering the performance for their children. In speaking with parents and educators about the performance, I found some potential audience members hesitant to believe their children could sit through a performance and engage appropriately. I saw parents and educators reprimand their children for responding vocally during a performance when they were not told ahead of time that this was acceptable for a SPARK! performance. Adults usually have a preconceived notion of what theatre is and how audience members should behave; typically young children do

not. In this sense, setting clear audience expectations was important to help both adult and child audience members understand what their role was within the performance.

I wanted the child audience to be given opportunities to exercise agency as they engaged in the performance. This had a significant impact on the way that we framed participation, as well as how we crafted the interactions that ended the piece. At the very beginning of *Jamie* the house manager/facilitator addressed the audience with the following announcement just before the story began:

I want to let you know a few important things about our story: 1. We ask that everyone stay sitting where they are so that everyone can see. 2. From your seats we'll invite you to play along with our actors in a few different activities, it's your choice if you want to play or just watch. 3. This is a no SHHHing show, you can feel free to respond to what's happening on stage. 4. After the performance we'll invite you to come take a closer look at our set and take part in some activities with our actors. Is everyone ready? Then I'll sit down and we'll start our story.  
(Corey *Jamie* Pg. 3)

This speech was crafted to introduce the audience to their role in the performance, setting expectations for what would happen, as well as introducing the idea that the child audience had a choice in whether they wanted to participate in interactions or not.

At the end of the piece, the house manager/facilitator invites the actors back onstage and then separates the child audience into three groups. One group goes with Jamie to draw pictures and talk with her about school, another group goes with the house manager/facilitator and creates movements with washcloths similar to a game Jamie plays within the performance, and the third group gathers on the set with Mom to look at the 'puppets' used in the story and to engage in dialogue about how they could make puppets out of household objects. With these activities, the child audience has the

opportunity to build off moments of the performance and create on their own. Our intention was to place the child audience in dialogue with the performers, mantling the children as experts by helping Jamie learn about school, creating new movements for the washcloth game and coming up with ideas for their own object puppets.

Overall I hope that with *Jamie* we created a relatable story for kids and parents alike. Some of my favorite moments are not from within the performances but rather from the post-show activities where young children told stories about their families and schools to the actors. Having toured the piece to schools we were happy with feedback from the educators, many who expressed surprise about how the children focused on and engaged in the story. From working on *Jamie* I gained a lot of insight on the function of direct address and facilitation within a story. As I move forward I will carefully consider how to frame and execute moments of interactivity within TVY.

### **The Role of the Audience in *The Moon's a Balloon***

*The Moon's a Balloon* places the audience as passive viewers. At the viewing I attended, two classes were on a fieldtrip to see *The Moon's a Balloon* at Patch's Odeon Theatre. As with many performances for children, the school groups filed in row by row settling into their seats with adult chaperones sprinkled every few students to ensure students would remain quietly seated. After a brief pre-show announcement, the house lights dimmed and the performance began. For the most part the audience, the vast majority of whom were four years old, stayed sitting but often they did not stay silent. And truthfully they weren't really expected to. They laughed, clapped and named the

colors as the lights changed between scenes. Largely, they engaged in this theatre experience the same way an adult audience would engage in a traditional theatrical experience. The children sat, focused themselves on the action and responded to moments that stood out to them as funny or worthy of applause. At the age of four, this audience knew they were being given a story so they sat and focused on receiving it.

While *The Moon's a Balloon* audience described above is in many ways similar to an older theatre-going group, Patch specifically designs their shows for children four to eight years old. In conversation Brown has pointed out to me that four through eight-year-olds are at a critical age of imagination and possibility making visual theatre an ideal choice as children can layer on their own interpretations. Additionally it is developmentally appropriate for children in this age group to be passive viewers as they can internalize thoughts, ideas and stories. This internalization is more difficult for the younger audience that was targeted for *Jamie*. So while the audience for *The Moon's a Balloon* is not physically engaged in interactive moments, one can see during the performance, visual theatre by design provides them opportunities to create within their imaginations.

In some ways *The Moon's a Balloon* provides the child audience with an incredible amount of agency because it is so open ended. On the other hand, because it is presented as a proscenium style piece in a darkened theatre and the child audience is expected to adhere to “good” audience behavior, less interaction is possible and therefore children have less opportunity to exercise their agency. For *The Moon's a Balloon* viewing I attended, Brown met the invited child audience in the lobby of the theatre,

greeted them and told them a bit about the performance they were about to see. During this exchange Brown set some expectations for the audience, telling them that the theatre would get dark, that each child would need to stay sitting in their own seat and encouraging them to use the restrooms before the performance started. Additionally Brown let them know it was okay to laugh, clap and be excited, adding that the artists working on the piece wanted to hear the audience's thoughts about the performance. Brown explained that the children could talk to the artists after the performance or let their teachers know what they thought when they got back to school. In giving this pre-show speech Brown set expectations for the audience and framed their role for this performance. This was done in a friendly, inviting and easily understood manner that invited the audience to sit and enjoy the show.

Within *The Moon's a Balloon* the role of the audience is established early and is fairly set. The audience may have an impact on the performance through feedback after the performance, but largely during the show the audience serves to receive a story from the performance rather than contribute to it. One interesting component of *The Moon's a Balloon* is that the final scene includes a tape of children's voices singing a simple melody. The idea for Brown was that this song would cue the performers to connect to the audience who would ideally, during the repetitions of the song, begin to sing along. The child audience with whom I attended the viewing were the same children whose voices were recorded for the final song. However despite knowing the song from school almost none of the children joined in the singing. Having been placed in the role of passive audience members, the children didn't shift. Brown and I agreed that this was

likely due to the fact that the children were not cued to sing. Some audience members may have even wondered if it was permissible for them to join in. Whether it is the house lights coming up, the actors onstage encouraging the audience to join in, or some other form of invitation, this example shows that without clear expectations and framing, the audience may not understand their role in a production. Particularly challenging, as noted in both *Jamie* and *The Moon's a Balloon*, is when the role of an audience member shifts after it has been established.

### **The Role of the Audience in *The Balloon Project***

Within the theatre space for *The Balloon Project* the audience members were largely passive viewers. However, the opening and closing pieces of the performance took place in the lobby where the child audience was invited and encouraged to play alongside the performers with small sand filled balloons and a variety of other materials. The center of the lobby featured a large white circle with a smaller black circle inside. As the audience entered the lobby two performers sat on either side of the large circle singing and playing ukuleles, while other performers were handing balloons to child audience members. The audience played in the lobby until the house managers opened the doors to the theatre space. As audience members entered the theatre, the house managers asked children to place their balloons in baskets so they could be used for 'the everyone thing' (a collaborative art piece) later in the performance. After the audience was seated in the theatre, the performers continued their song as they walked into the theatre space.

The first moment of performance within the theatre space was a short poem about balloons. Several children called out during this poem in attempts to dialogue with the actress reciting her dialogue. She acknowledged them and moved on with her poem. It seemed that with no pre-show speech and with interaction in the lobby, the child audience was uncertain of their role within the theatre space. However once the recorded music began, the house lights dimmed and the visual theatre segments began, the child audience fell into their role as passive viewers seemingly without the need for any direct instruction. After the performance, the performers led a procession out of the theatre and back into the lobby. As the audience exited, they were each given a tiny balloon that the performers modeled placing into the giant circle where the cast had begun to gather and sing. The children gathered with the performers around the circle, placing balloons inside to create the ‘everyone thing’. After the performers completed their song the performance was over, but many children stayed in the lobby playing the balloons from the ‘everyone thing’, an art installation created by balloons that were used within the performance and offered by the audience during the final song.

*The Balloon Project* represents an interesting mix in the role of the audience as they shift between engaging in exploration and being passive viewers. The target audience aligned with Patch’s mission of serving four to eight-year-olds. I was insistent on this project that we extend the marketing to say three to eight years old, knowing from my time with touring *Jamie* and observing *The Moon’s a Balloon* that most three-year-olds in Austin were capable of engaging in our piece. Because *The Balloon Project* was a collaboration, it featured interactive moments in the lobby consistent with the previous



work of SPARK! as well as the visual theatre performance that Patch is well known for. It is interesting to consider how child agency and the setting of audience expectations are impacted by combining moments of interaction with a performance as well as how this combination reflects intentional design.

During the moments of interaction in the lobby, the child audience was given the freedom to explore the balloons and other materials openly. The performers were in the space playing alongside the child audience, at times modeling things that could be done with the materials at hand but largely allowing and encouraging the children to lead their own exploration. In moving into the theatre space the tone of the piece shifted, particularly as the music changed from live ukulele and voice to recorded music. As this shift occurred, the house lights also dimmed down cueing the audience to adapt to their role as passive viewers for the next portion of the show. The cues of dimming light and recorded music came after the recited poem, which was interrupted by dialogue from several of the younger audience members. This interruption demonstrates how moving into the theatre space served as a cue for older audience members who have prior reference and expectations for their role as audience members in a theatre. The youngest audience members often don't enter theatres with pre-conceived notions of theatre or an idea of how an audience member behaves. It's reasonable to assume that in addition to the recorded music and lights cueing young audience members to their role, that the adults accompanying them may have also whispered a message that it was time to sit and quietly watch the show. At the end of the performance the house lights came up and the performers began live music as they cued the audience to follow them back into the

lobby. Within *The Balloon Project* I was able to see how non-verbal cues could be effectively used to shift audience members from more active to passive roles. As I continue creating TVY I am interested in experimenting with how light and sound may be useful in helping to set and shift the role of the audience within a given performance.

### **Comparing and Contrasting the Role of the Audience**

While each piece offered differing levels of audience participation, the role of the audience was developmentally rooted and intentional design was implemented. Within each of the three pieces framing and cuing audiences so they knew their role in the production was crucial. During the development of each piece the theatre-makers questioned how their target audience could best engage in a theatrical experience, and in performance cued the audience to how they would be participating. The intended level of interaction has a direct impact on how a piece is developed, as each moment of participation requires attention to how the moment is framed and if children are given opportunities to exercise agency within an interaction. While Patch's audiences of four to eight-year-olds are not physically interacting, this is because children at this age can internalize their thoughts and participate without interactively engaging, according to Brown. *Jamie* on the other hand relies on moments of interactive engagement as well as welcoming verbal responses, knowing that children between two and four years of age still often process out loud and need more kinesthetic engagement than older children ("Early Language and Literacy Skills: 24 to 36 Months").

Often the level of audience engagement and interaction has a correlation with the intended age of a piece's target audience. Looking back to the Spectrum of TVY Audience Engagement, the example I used for fully active audience participation was a piece of Baby Theatre designed by Sally Chance. *Oogly Boogly*, detailed in chapter one, is another piece of Baby Theatre that places the child audience in a highly active role. Preschool Theatre often finds a middle ground between the passive audience role traditionally seen in TYA and the highly active role necessary in Baby Theatre. All three processes analyzed engage their audience, with the most active role for the youngest target audience and the oldest target audience being placed in the most passive role. This aligns with my understanding of child development, in acknowledgment of the concept that as children develop they become increasingly capable of engaging internally. Charting TVY pieces on the TVY Audience Engagement Spectrum and listing target audience ages suggests that Preschool Theatre can serve as a gateway for preparing children to slowly shift into the passive roles seen in most traditional theatre experiences.

### **The Role of Collaborators**

For a 2012 article I wrote that was published in TYA Today entitled *Part of the Action: The Role of Actors and Audience in Interactive Theatre*, I interviewed six theatre practitioners who create interactive TYA. Within the article, the practitioners shared what they look for when casting actors for interactive TYA naming that actors for this type of work need to have: the ability to reach out and connect to a young audience; listening

skills; and a knowledge of, respect for and rapport with children. All six practitioners agree that interactive theatre requires a specific type of actor in order to engage audiences. Similarly TVY requires collaborators who possess these same abilities.

In TVY the form, organizational structure and role of the audience have a significant impact on how a piece is developed. A director seeks different types of performers for different types of performances. For example a director may seek an actor with singing ability for a piece with music or a dancer for a movement piece. Highly interactive TVY requires that performers possess a stronger knowledge of the child audience as they frame and facilitate interactions. Organizational structure, for example a University may be developing a piece as part of a class, may dictate who is eligible to participate in productions impacting how productions are cast and what considerations are in place during development. In the following section I will look at how the form, organizational structure and role of the audience impacted the role of collaborators within the three development processes in which I engaged in order to analyze the impact of these factors on the involved theatre-makers.

### **The Role of the Collaborators in *Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath***

With audience members being placed in an active role within *Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath* the performers for this piece needed to possess the ability to engage with the child audience. One of the performers in *Jamie* wrote within a survey reflection; “This production is no different than an adult production. This production needs engagement, evolved characters and honest performance like any other production”.

While I agree with the idea that *Jamie* needs engagement, evolved characters and an honest performance I would also add that *Jamie* requires attention to the specific needs of a very young audience. This attention to the very young audience impacted the role of the collaborators who worked on *Jamie* in significant ways.

One major component for *Jamie* and all SPARK! pieces to date is that performances are interactive requiring collaborators to be in the role of actor/facilitators. This need to facilitate interactive moments requires that all members of the SPARK! ensemble have an understanding of child development so they can appropriately frame and lead interactive activities. Within the development of *Jamie* ensemble members were consulted throughout the process to help find appropriate actions and transitions within the story. The house manager/facilitator shared during a survey response, “We constantly ask ‘what would a 4 year old do in the bathroom next?’ to find the next moment in the script”. This demonstrates how within *Jamie* the entire collaborative team approached not only the performance but the development process with an eye towards the target audience. We started our semester with several sessions focused on child development. We focused on exploring how children move, think and socialize. We culminated with each ensemble member being asked to observe young children and report back to the ensemble about what they saw. As we developed and solidified our performance, ensemble members drew from this knowledge of young children as they were asked to look at the performance through the eyes of a child to help determine what should happen in each moment of the play.

Often in the beginning phases of development for a TVY piece I find new SPARK! Ensemble members believe that staging a piece of TVY will be easy. They see the short and simple script, know the props are everyday objects and assume that performing for three-year-olds will be simple. About three weeks into working on *Jamie*, all of the collaborators shared their surprise at recognizing the specificity and intentionality that was required of them within the piece. In a reflection written on October 5, 2012 assistant director/dramaturge Greene writes:

It's exciting to see how challenging this work is to create. I love how the conversations that we have in our process for the very young mirror intense conversations I have had in other theatre-making processes, differing only in our audience demographic. We still ask: How do we challenge our audience? How do we engage them and keep them engaged? How does this relate to their lives? Is it real? Is this story important to tell? What is most important about this story? How can we create real characters with pressing needs and desires? ...We are asking more questions than I would have thought we had to for a TVY process.

(Attachment 1: SPARK! Sample Survey)

Many of the other ensemble reflections from this time also note how much more sophisticated and intentional *Jamie* was becoming than they thought when we began to develop the piece. One ensemble member commented about how the amount of questions we were asking about the child audience and their role in the performance was overwhelming noting, "...but I don't think it's a negative thing. It implies a high level of respect for our audience in that we care about developing a quality experience for them" ("SPARK! Reflection Response"). The idea that the collaborators on *Jamie* felt a desire to make informed choices when engaging in decision-making for the piece shows not only a high respect for the child audience but also a feeling of shared artistic investment.

Within *Jamie* collaborators balance the role of students learning about TVY and theatre-makers who engage in co-creating a piece of theatre designed for young children. On a typical day of touring *Jamie* the ensemble would arrive to help put the set together, move into their roles as actor/facilitators who run the performance and interactive moments, engage in a brief post-show reflection questioning and critically responding to their own work, then finally would shift back into the crew to break down the set and leave. In addition to spoken reflections each ensemble member filled out a survey response to each performance showcasing their shifting understanding of young children and TVY. The multiple roles required of all collaborators on *Jamie* was necessary due to the diverse intentions and goals of this piece. While at times challenging and overwhelming to be placed in multiple roles during each rehearsal and performance I ultimately feel we found a balance that allowed us to appropriately serve both the ensemble members as students and the audience. Based on the ensemble's final reflections, I believe that they would agree.

### **The Role of the Collaborators in *The Moon's a Balloon***

Patch hires a team of professional artists to work on their visual theatre pieces. Some roles, including director and technical director, remain consistent as they are full time staff members for the company. Other roles, including performers, designers and stage managers, shift with each project. For *The Moon's a Balloon* director Dave Brown cast two dancers to work on the development of the piece. Previously Brown had mainly worked with actors who had some movement training in creating visual theatre pieces.

Brown also put in place a musician to serve as the composer for music to accompany the various segments within the piece. In casting dancers Brown addressed the need to help the dancers move away from their technique training, explaining to me during a meeting in Adelaide that much of the first development period was spent helping the performers find and embrace their child-like impulses in creating movement sequences. Additionally Brown shared that he knew both dancers had experience with young children as parents, teachers or artists. With the development process for *The Moon's a Balloon* the performers needed to embrace child-like impulses and energy for their roles but the performance did not require any direct interaction with the child audience. Set in a professional theatre, the attention to the child audience and their needs fell mainly on Brown, who, as the director needed to bring together a team and create an artistic vision that was intentionally designed for a very young audience. The role of the collaborators in this piece was to bring in their already cultivated artistic skills for Brown to shape and shift, ensuring everything came together to create a cohesive piece of TVY.

This is not to say the collaborators in *The Moon's a Balloon* did not have shared artistic ownership of the piece. All collaborators, or theatre-makers as Brown refers to them, were bringing together their talents and creating segments of the work. However Brown took the lead in terms of intentionally designing the piece for young children without the need to educate the collaborators on what he was doing and why. If *The Moon's a Balloon* was to feature moments of interaction, a greater knowledge of the child audience might have been required of the performers.



## **The Role of the Collaborators in *The Balloon Project***

As *The Balloon Project* represents a combined effort between Patch and UT Austin, the project was designed to allow UT Austin students to engage in Patch's visual theatre-making process while exploring how a piece of visual theatre may shift in a different cultural context. Because a major goal of the project was for student-artists to learn about Patch's process and TVY through engaging in the development process, student-artists were chosen based on both demonstrated ability and interest in the project. Potential collaborators applied to participate in the project, naming what skills they would bring to it, as well as what they hoped to gain from taking part in this exchange (Attachment 5: Balloon Project Application). This demonstrates the balance sought for student-artists to both contribute and learn throughout the project.

To facilitate this balance, Brown engaged everyone in all aspects of the process at the beginning. This meant that the designers participated in warm-ups, the performers were taught to make balloons and the stage managers worked on the lobby installation. This helped to ensure that everyone was learning about various pieces of the process while simultaneously allowing us to quickly move into setting segments of the performance, a necessity given the short amount of time for development. For the interactive portions of the performance, it is important to note that two of the six performers had served in the SPARK! ensemble for the past year and a half, while the other two performers were students within the Department's BFA Theatre Studies program working towards their teaching certification. The performers' experience with facilitation allowed for the interaction to be crafted in a short amount of time. I gave the

performers, all of whom had experience with children and a knowledge of child development, a brief introduction to what this interaction would look like. The remaining two performers were primarily charged with creating live music. In addition to the performers' experience with children, I was serving as one of the house managers, which allowed me to be present throughout the interactive portions of the performance as a support.

Similar to Patch's process where Brown is primarily responsible for thinking about the cohesiveness and intentional design of any given piece, Brown and I shared this role during *The Balloon Project*. While the student-artists crafted sections of the performance, ultimately Brown and I served as the outside eye making changes to create a cohesive piece, as well as shifting moments to be most appropriate for the intended audience. Brown and I, as a directorial team, layered an expert knowledge of child development and artistic form onto the piece, which served as a type of dramaturgy.

### **Comparing and Contrasting the Role of Collaborators**

Within TVY the role of the audience impacts the role and necessary qualifications of the collaborators for a piece. Highly interactive TVY requires that the performers be properly prepared to facilitate engagements with a very young audience. Additionally for a piece that engages the audience as co-creators, the performers are invited to shift the piece as needed for each individual audience. When speaking about collaborators on a TVY piece, Brown uses the term theatre-maker as a way to account for the fact that members of the artistic team for a project may have multiple roles and bring multiple

skills into the development process. Regardless of how active or passive the child audience may be, all three development processes focused on identifying collaborators that would bring with them a level of understanding of and respect for young children.

In this chapter I illustrated that there are many forms of TVY. I provided a Spectrum of Audience Engagement in TVY, explaining how audience members can either be highly active participants or passive viewers in a theatrical experience. I named the form used for each development process and analyzed the role of the audience. Finally, I looked at how the role of audience, form of TVY and the organizational structures impacted each piece. Next, in the final chapter, I will reflect on how engaging in the three development processes impacted my own evolution as a practitioner.

## Chapter Five: *Reflection*

### Reflection on the Development Processes

As I analyzed each development process in this thesis I named some of the challenges, considerations and limitations that surrounded each piece. The three TVY pieces were intentionally designed under their distinct organizational structures, and each process shifted their goals and intentions to meet the needs of their various stakeholders. Below I will share a final reflection on each of the three processes, naming some of the major lessons I learned. I will also look more closely at how my thesis work has impacted my evolution as a practitioner. Finally I will conclude with some of my final thoughts on TVY.

Within *Jamie* I struggled to balance my commitment to training the actor/facilitators and my desire to create a high quality piece of TVY. Additionally the many roles I took on within this project proved to be overwhelming at times. Currently I am working on a revision of the *Jamie* script for a production of the piece to be produced by Trike Theatre. The production is scheduled to tour in May 2013 and will be the first TVY piece produced at Trike Theatre, a professional TYA in Northwest Arkansas founded in 2008 (Trike). With this piece I continue to struggle with the role of the audience as I question how to engage children through their interactions while ensuring a cohesive and realistic story. As of now, I am still avoiding the use of direct address with the exception of the house manager/facilitator. This is due to the fact that I am unsure of how to best negotiate the challenges of shifting the role of audience members between

active participants and passive viewers when the actors use direct address and facilitation. Moving forward to create other pieces, I would like to explore how to place audience members in a more active role where they can contribute to the piece, but now recognize that this is extremely difficult in a linear narrative piece of TVY. I have come to believe that highly active audience roles best fit with a different form of TVY. Within *Jamie* I found the moments of audience interaction, whether it be children calling out the location of a duck moving around the stage or making their washcloths spin in unison with the performers onstage to be highly engaging and delightful. This deepens my investment in continuing to research how interactivity is best facilitated within TVY.

One limitation for me in the development process for *The Moon's a Balloon* was that I was only present for part of the development process. Additionally I entered this development process without a specific role. My main purpose was to observe and gather information both for the purpose of this thesis and to develop an understanding of the piece as we prepared for *The Balloon Project*. While Brown and the artistic team were incredibly open in providing me information and access to their documentation, and inviting my opinion as an outside eye on the piece, I was further removed from this process than I was from the other two. I still have questions about moments of the development and there are no plans for me to be involved in this piece any further. My question surround how moments of open exploration and play video taped during the first two development phases shift as they begin being crafted into refined movement segments and are layered with dramaturgy. I also question how Patch may be able to engage their child audience as artists so I was pleased to learn that for future

performances, Patch plans to include some interactive engagements in the lobby for children to participate in before and after their shows. The intention is for these engagements to be framed in a way they do not require facilitation, instead allowing audience members to engage as they wish based on simple (if any) directions. I believe this addition will help to engage children with the piece in new ways, as they will have the opportunity to serve as both passive viewers and active creative artists. My excitement in seeing Patch move toward interactive engagements is not meant to infer that their performances should seek to place audience members in a more active role. Seeing Patch's work with a young audience made me think differently about the notion of very young audience serving as passive viewers, I now believe that there is value in young children having opportunities to engage with art as both passive viewers and active participants. However, providing opportunities to engage with the content of a performance as a creative artist in addition to a passive audience member can only add even more depth to the audience experience.

Co-directing *The Balloon Project* was an amazing experience that enabled me to explore and apply some of the methods I had observed in *The Moon's a Balloon* and some of the interactivity I had created with SPARK!. Time proved challenging as the fast pace limited our ability to explore and refine the piece. Additionally having only one performance made this a unique development process. In reflecting on this piece I am left thinking about the process more than the product. This is due in part to the fact that while no plans exist for this *The Balloon Project* to be performed again, there is a strong possibility of future collaborations of a similar nature. While I believe we were able to

meet the goals and intentions of all stakeholders for this project, it proved difficult at times to have such a large number of stakeholders each bringing to the project their own goals and intentions. In looking towards future collaborations of this kind, establishing clear goals and intentions that all parties agree to as early in the planning process as possible will help ensure a positive collaborative experience. Entering collaborations can be tricky and with *The Balloon Project* I found that establishing a mutual trust and understanding with my artistic partners allowed for us to find a shared ownership over the process and product. For me *The Balloon Project* presented an opportunity to explore the intersections of pedagogy and performance in new ways through opening new aesthetic possibilities in incorporating the use of lighting, projection and sound while also crafting opportunities for interaction between the performers and the audience.

### **My Evolution as a Practitioner**

Through experiencing these three processes I grew tremendously as a TVY practitioner. When I first set out to create *HANDS* my goal was to identify how to create high quality TVY. I hoped it would be simple to name the specific steps one takes to make a piece of TVY. I imagined that I would walk away from creating a piece of TVY and be able to write down one specific formula that made it work. What I have come to realize is that there is no one right way to create TVY. There are many different development processes, many different intentions and many different forms. Each brings their own challenges and their own joys. What does exist and I have come to name is the importance of enacting intentional design in developing TVY.

As I have engaged in my thesis work, I discovered that in each of the three development processes, the theatre-makers accounted for the developmental, social and emotional needs of a very young audience. Intentional design requires practitioners to look at their work through the eyes of their audience. I believe all artists should continually consider the experience and needs of their audience throughout their development processes. With the specific needs of very young audiences, however understanding and considering the audience experience is crucial to creating a piece that can engage this audience in a meaningful way. For me a meaningful piece of TVY allows a young child to see and understand something new, to see something they know in a new way or for the adults accompanying child audience members to think of children differently, if even for just a moment.

Upon reflection, I noted that when both Brown and I, as directors, stepped in during the development of our respective pieces to layer knowledge of child development and artistic form onto the work, this served as a type of dramaturgy. It appears intentional design is ultimately asking dramaturgical questions about if a piece of theatre is best serving its intended audience. With this, intentional design requires that actor/facilitators who will be engaging in interactive moments with very young audiences have an appropriate knowledge of children so they can successfully facilitate interactivity within a given piece. As I move forward in continuing to create TVY I want to be sure that I determine and acknowledge my target audience early as I begin development on new pieces so that I am able to create theatrical experiences that are developmentally appropriate for the child audience members I wish to serve. With this, I see how



intentional design is an important tool as I continue striving to create TVY of the highest artistic and educational value.

As I took part in TVY development processes, refined my own artistry, engaged with TVY theory, and learned from other practitioners, I began to generate a list of considerations for creating TVY. This list of considerations serves to provide a series of questions I intend to ask myself during the development of future pieces of TVY. For me this list of considerations aligns with intentional design, in providing me a series of key questions to ensure I am developing TVY to best serve my intended audience. The list names elements I have found to be important to consider when creating TVY. These considerations have grown out of my research and creative exploration within the three development processes I engaged as well as my research on TVY and knowledge of young children. Alongside each consideration, I have included the key questions I intend to ask of myself as I develop new work in TVY.

### **List of Considerations for the Creation of TVY**

#### **Expectations**

Young children enter TVY with little or no pre-conceived notion of what theatre is. Therefore, it is important that expectations are set so that audience members understand how to best engage in the theatrical experience they are about to encounter. Within my thesis, expectations were set through Brown's speech to the child audience prior to *The Moon's a Balloon*, as well as through the house manager/facilitator at the beginning of *Jamie*. In developing *Jamie*, the house manager/facilitator speech given at the top of the

show was frequently revised as we determined the expectations we wanted to set for audience behavior. The speech was also continually refined as we considered how to best communicate these expectations as the piece continued to develop.

Key Questions:

- What expectations do we have for child audience members?
- How do set these expectations?
- How will we handle situations where disruptive behaviors occur?
- What is the role of the adults attending?
- How do we prepare them to engage with their child or step back to allow their child to lead?

### **Multi-Sensory**

Imagination Stage, Alliance Theatre and Oily Cart are all well-known for their use of multi-sensory engagement within TVY performances. My knowledge of child development provides me an understanding that children engage using multiple senses, favoring certain types of engagement, stimulation and exploration during different stages of development. An example of this is that children six to twelve months frequently put objects in their mouths experiencing textures and tastes with their tongues. Within *Jamie* I chose to integrate moments of kinesthetic engagement knowing that two to three-year-olds often associate more strongly with things they experience for themselves than things they only hear or see.

Key Questions:

- How might we engage multiple senses?

- What is the role of kinesthetic engagement in this piece?
- What precautions do we need to take in preparing multi-sensory experiences?  
[e.g., considering allergies or cleaning props that may be put in a child's mouth]

## **Framing**

During *The Balloon Project* we questioned how to best design pre- and post- show engagements that would link to the performance, while providing the audience an opportunity to deepen their connection to the content of the piece. Within *The Moon's a Balloon*, *The Balloon Project* and *Jamie* the theatre-makers encountered moments where the audience role was shifted. *The Balloon Project* demonstrated how shifting lights and from live to recorded music helped shift the audience from active participants to passive viewers. Meanwhile in both *Jamie* and *The Moon's a Balloon* questions arose about how to best frame the pieces.

### **Key Questions:**

- How do we prepare the audience for their role in the performance?
- What can we provide pre- and post- show to help audiences best engage with the performance?
- How do we best explain this performance to parents, educators and child audience members so they understand what it will be?

## **Time**

Over the past forty years Patch has come to create their performances using a series of segments each lasting two to four minutes. Additionally Patch names on their website that forty two minutes is the ideal running time for their pieces. I appreciate the

specificity of this formula but continue to look at how patterns emerge within my own development of TVY. Considering the attention spans of young children as well as their capacity for processing new elements within a piece time becomes an important consideration in TVY.

Key Questions:

- What role does tempo play in this piece?
- How long are individual segments?
- How long is the entire performance?
- Is the time expectation for focus realistic for the target audience?

### **Repetition**

Repetition and ritual play important roles within ECE. This is due, in part, to the fact that young children must be exposed to something repeatedly in order to come to an understanding of it. Within TVY, this may mean creating a pattern within the story or naming an object repeatedly. In creating *Jamie*, we played with the inclusion of repetition and patterns. There is a duck who repeatedly appears throughout the bathroom, and the child audience delighted in pointing out the duck when it popped up. Additionally patterns are established within both the game Jamie plays with wash cloths and within the story Mom tells using puppets.

Key Questions:

- What is the role of repetition in this piece?
- Are key ideas/concepts/props/characters repeated enough to be memorable/tracked by the target audience?

- Is there a place for ritual in this piece?

### **Familiarity**

*Jamie* stemmed from the desire to create a story about something familiar to young children, taking a bath. Much of SPARK!'s work includes the use of realistic and recognizable objects that may be turned into more abstract things. Patch's open-ended narratives tend to deal with more abstract concepts and objects that are familiar but somehow special. I believe that both the concrete and the abstract have a role in TVY, each tying to different purposes and affording practitioners different opportunities within a piece.

Key Questions:

- What is recognizable and realistic?
- What is the role of more abstract things/concepts?
- What may be overwhelming to a young child?

### **Child-Friendly**

When working out of the University ensuring a space was child friendly proved to be challenging at times. During *The Balloon Project* we set the lobby the evening prior to our performance, to return in the morning to find almost all the outlet covers we had inserted had been removed. In addition, making spaces for children to choose for themselves and guide their own exploration proved important to me for both *The Balloon Project* and *Jamie*. The idea of creating a child-friendly space through both empowering children to make choices and through ensuring a safe, accessible place for your target audience to come into is a necessity for TVY.

#### Key Questions:

- Is the space child-friendly and accessible?
- Have we taken appropriate precautions to ensure the space is safe for young children?
- Where might we make space for children to demonstrate agency?

#### Language

The projects analyzed for this thesis included both narrative and visual theatre. This in itself raises questions about the role of language within TVY. As I have continued developing Jamie in preparation for the May 2013 production at Trike Theatre, I have made efforts to simplify the language Jamie uses within the play adding additional non-verbal action to the script. For me this idea ties back to one of my favorite quotes from Charles Fowler, which reads, “Young children respond to gestures and movement before they react to the spoken word. They understand and explore sound before they learn to speak” (qtd. in "Illinois Learning Standards"). Tying to child development this quote demonstrates the importance of the visual language for young children, whose immersing language skills should be considered as one develops TVY.

#### Key Questions:

- Is language necessary?
- If so, when? Is the language used accessible?
- How and where might we limit the amount of spoken language?
- Does narrative or open-ended work best serve this piece?

## **Engagement**

Finding moments of engagement has become a key for all three projects analyzed in this thesis. *Jamie* featured interaction throughout the performance, *The Balloon Project* included engagements that intersected with the performance and *The Moon's a Balloon* will feature pre-show activities for their upcoming performances. This demonstrates how all three projects are considering how to best welcome their audiences into the space and make them a part of the experience so they can build a deeper connection to the performance. Within intentional design for TVY practitioners should consider how to best engage their target audience in creating a deep connection with the performance.

Key Questions:

- How do we invite audience into the space?
- Do we provide a slow enough build to the action that apprehensive young audience members have a chance to gain comfort with this theatrical experience?
- What are the most appropriate ways to engage our target audience to participate in an artistic experience?

## **Responsive to Audience**

TVY audiences are often not shy about voicing their opinions about a piece. It is the duty of TVY practitioners to make sure they are listening and considering these opinions.

Workshop productions were held for both *The Moon's a Balloon* and *Jamie* inviting selected audiences in early to gain feedback on the pieces being created. Early on, in creating work with SPARK! at the Austin Children's Museum, I recognized the value of identifying key questions and observing audiences as they watched a performance to see

and hear how they reacted to different parts. For SPARK!, I also came to understand that we could never predict what a child audience would do; we had to take our performances to children and see. This meant empowering the actor/facilitators in SPARK! to shift performances as needed to serve different audiences, which is crucial to TVY work that places audience members in highly active roles.

Key Questions:

- When will we look for audience feedback on this piece?
- How can we engage children in the development process to ensure it is appropriate for our target audience?
- How might the piece shift during a performance to meet the needs of a specific audience?

Within my thesis, I state that I believe the form of TVY, the role of the audience and the development process for a piece of TVY should all link to the intentions and goals set for a given piece. It is my hope that the goals and intentions set for a piece align with an intentional design that includes considerations put in place to address the needs of the intended audience for that piece. This list of considerations is by no means exhaustive. As I continue to create TVY I anticipate that new questions and considerations will emerge. I am also certain that future projects will provide me with further insights on working with very young audiences helping me find new methods to meet some of the challenges posed by TVY. I hope and plan to constantly evolve as a TVY practitioner.



## **Why Create Theatre for the Very Young?**

When I introduce someone to the idea of TVY for the first time I am often asked, “Why do the very young need theatre?” Established and well-meaning TYA practitioners have told me that creating theatre for children under the age of six is a waste of time, as they can’t understand or appreciate it. My thoughts are quite different from those practitioners. One of the most valuable lessons I learned from my research and practice is an increased understanding of young children and their capacities. Therefore I will conclude my thesis with some of the theoretical, cultural and societal reasons I have found for why and how TVY is valuable.

While the examples of practitioners and companies included in this thesis represent the care and intention that goes into designing high quality artistic and educational experiences for infants and preschoolers, TVY is often undervalued. As a relatively new form of theatre practice, particularly in the US, TVY is an area of theatre that is often dismissed by parents, educators and even artists. Knowing this, when I first submitted *HANDS* for The Cohen New Works Festival in 2011, I knew that in order to be accepted I needed to explain my vision for the piece, as well as provide a clear definition for and explanation of TVY as a valid form of theatre. When the 2013 NWF proposal was released, I did not need to submit in the ‘other’ category and define TVY, because the proposal form listed TVY as a category. This doesn’t mean that students, faculty and artists in our department all know, or understand and accept TVY fully as a form of theatre, but it serves as an example of how in my three years of working on TVY at UT Austin, I am starting to see an acknowledgement of TVY.

One of the factors in creating this shift has been an increase in the number of opportunities to engage with TVY both through the University and in the Austin community. *HANDS* commenced my work in TVY at UT Austin with four students putting up three performances for a total audience of no more than seventy, with approximately half of the audience made up of children. This Fall SPARK! toured *Jamie Doesn't Want to Take a Bath* into six area preschools and performed twice to full houses at ZACH Theatre serving over three hundred children and approximately one hundred adults. UT Austin Department of Theatre and Dance made it possible for me to spend a week in Adelaide, Australia working with Patch Theatre Company and meeting with several Adelaide-based TVY practitioners. Then in January *The Balloon Project* brought together ten students from across the Department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin to collaborate on a new piece of visual theatre bringing in over 120 audience members while also bringing together community partners from seven different Austin arts organizations with UT Austin students and faculty for a roundtable discussion on early arts. As more artists and audience members have a chance to engage with TVY I am confident there will continue to be a shift with more people acknowledging the value of this work.

In addition to being a new form of theatre practice, the intended audience of TVY is an often underserved population. It wasn't until November 2011 that the US Department of Education proposed the first ever Office for Early Learning in recognition of increasing evidence that early experiences impact future success (US Department of Education). Psychologist Paul Bloom, in a 2010 New York Times article recounts how society's understanding of the capacities and inclinations of babies have grown and

changed (Bloom). While acknowledging that many still see infants as spastic in action and undisciplined in focus, Bloom points to a study in the 1980s showing that babies understand basic physics and have expectations about how objects should behave based on this. He goes on to explain studies in the 1990s that evidenced that five-month-olds understand rudimentary math with objects and that babies possess a ‘naïve psychology’ allowing them to distinguish people from objects. Bloom’s article continues as he explains his own research and experiments attempting to determine “the moral life of babies” (Bloom). These sorts of studies alongside recent advances in brain research have shown that babies are far more capable, responsive and intelligent than many previously believed.

Despite recent research and increasing acknowledgement that early experiences impact a child’s development, many question the purpose of Theatre for the Very Young. When I first created the SPARK! ensemble we struggled to recruit members with many in the University community still unsure if TVY held value and questioning if the form should be considered theatre. Our numbers have steadily climbed, and we are now able to be more selective on who participates in SPARK!, ensuring they have an interest in working with the very young and possess the artistic capacity to create high quality performances. Despite prior experience with young children and an excitement to participate in *Jamie Doesn’t Want to Take a Bath*, one actor/facilitator posed a question about our child audience at one of first rehearsals asking, “Can they [two to four-year-olds] follow a story? If not, is it still theatre?” Later this ensemble member went into more depth on this idea questioning the line between theatre performance and creative

play (showing that hers was a question of categorization as opposed to validity). From post-show discussions, we found that our audiences not only followed the story, but also appeared to engage with it on multiple levels. While some may question if our lack of lighting and our meager set housed in 8'x8' canopy tent on the school playground shift SPARK! performances too far outside a traditional theatrical settings to be called theatre. I believe our piece to be a valid theatrical experience despite the lack of fancy scenery and lighting. In many ways I believe our simple set made *Jamie* more accessible to very young audiences. First, this simple set meant we could tour to preschools, who because of car seat laws would have difficulty transporting their students to a theatre. Additionally having the performance set in a familiar space, surrounded by the comforts of known caregivers avoided the trepidation some children feel in new spaces. Still questions about validity are often asked about TVY, regardless of production value.

Many artists who create work in TYA are accustomed to hearing doubtful arguments and questions about if the child audience understands or appreciates what is happening onstage. As one might imagine, these questions intensify when talking about TVY, as both audience members and artists question if, for a one-year-old, a TVY experience is worth the cost of a performance. In the 2012 article *Theatre for Babies What's the Point?* Sue Giles, Polyglot Theatre's Artistic Director, responds to some of these questions. Giles addresses how TYA, let alone TVY is scrutinized, "partly because parents are concerned about what affects their children, but partly too out of fear. 'Value for money' is another issue, related to how people perceive 'the place and power of children in our midst'" (qtd. in Dawkins). This article goes on to point out that TVY is

not only about babies, but the adults who accompany them noting the importance of helping adults connect with their child so they are seeing the world of a play together. Babies, as the article notes, are ‘responsive, open and unpredictable in ways we as adults are forced to forget’ (Dawkins). Lyn Gardner addresses these same ideas in her 2012 post for The Guardian’s online newspaper stating, “When done well, these [Theatre for the Very Young] shows demonstrate that audiences are never too young for theatre, or to have their curiosity and imaginations inspired” (Gardner).

In addition to artistic and social value, TVY has inherent educational value for young audience members. TVY often incorporates interactive moments and can be considered as, or lead to, dramatic play. Dramatic play is an established piece of the curriculum in many ECE programs and appears throughout educational research, noted as an important developmental experience for children. Dramatic play is the practice of either individual or group interactions that incorporate imagined elements. It is a form of play where an individual fantasizes and acts out roles. This imaginative play can be structured and adult-led or may be created entirely by children. Dramatic play may also be an imitative activity in which a child reacts to something they have seen or heard. (see Ward, Vygotsky, Bruner). TVY productions often provide opportunities for young children to engage interactively and imaginatively before, during or after performances. Additionally many parents and educators note that after productions children imitate gestures, actions or even reenact scenes from performances they have seen.

Educational and developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky theorized that imaginative play and creative activities allow young children to stretch their capabilities

and learn as they work to expand their understanding of the world. He noted that children are most successful in learning through creative means when structure and assistance is provided by an adult (Vygotsky). *Critical Links*, a compilation of research studies published by the Arts Education Partnership, establishes that imaginative play can be taught through modeling, and activities initiated by adults often show effects that last beyond the initial adult led sessions. Additionally a second study within *Critical Links* establishes dramatic and imaginative play as a tool for literacy learning as well as a way to establish a motivation for students to gain literacy skills (Deasy 24-27). Based upon these and other educational sources along with my experience as a TVY practitioner, I have come to believe that TVY and accompanying actor facilitated workshops can produce a positive impact on both the creative play tendencies and literacy skills of preschoolers. While some empirical evidence is present to serve as a theoretical underpinning, more research is necessary to explore what happens when pedagogy and performance meet in TVY. In the near future I hope to evaluate the educational impact of TVY on creative play and literacy skills among young audience members.

There are many reasons to value the creation and performance of TVY. Some practitioners hope to raise the audiences of the future, while others aim to provide parents and children a bonding experience. There are those who look to fulfill an educational goal and those who simply aim to entertain. CTC Artistic Director Peter Brosius calls access to TVY, "...a social justice issue. Kids who don't get this, who don't have this cognitive experience early on, fall behind" (qtd. in Weinert-Kendt 46). With this quote Brosius speaks of the role of TVY in child development, pointing out that if TVY is not

made accessible for all young children it may contribute to achievement gaps. A SPARK! ensemble member wrote in one of her reflections that she believes TVY, “has high intrinsic, artistic and educational value for children under the age of five. It engages and inspires creativity and imagination.” To me the simplest and one of the most compelling reasons to create TVY is stated in the 2011 Charter of Children’s Rights to Art and Culture. While the charter articulates eighteen statements on what children have the right to, it ends with the simple statement “All children have the right to art and culture” and I believe, that regardless of age, they do (Nerattini 57).

Admittedly, US TVY is young, with productions created in collaboration with international companies beginning only six years ago US practitioners and companies are smart to gain insight from abroad where TVY has a more well-established history. My own work draws heavily from practitioners abroad, with my thesis looking at two projects that tie to Adelaide’s Patch Theatre whose time-honored development processes for visual theatre work have provided me a framework and point of reference as I continue creating TVY. However US practice in TVY is growing, led by a small group of theatres and practitioners who have dared to undertake the challenge of experimenting with the form. Several TYA companies including The Alliance Theatre, Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis, Imagination Stage, Growing Stage, Trike Theatre and Seattle Children’s Theatre are producing new work for the very young. In addition, while having been in existence less than five years, Arts on the Horizon represents a new generation of US theatre-making; much like the SPARK! Theatre ensemble, Arts on the Horizon focuses solely on work for children under the age of six.

I call on TYA companies and practitioners to consider the theoretical, cultural and societal reasons why TVY is valuable asking them to consider how TVY may benefit their companies and the very young children in their communities. I believe that with a bit of research the resources for practitioners to implement intentional design in TVY are accessible via the Internet, a local library, community members or through partnership with experienced practitioners. As US practice continues to grow, it is of great importance that the TVY work being produced is of high educational and artistic value. Practitioners in the US should continue learning from international work, as well as turning to each other for support in identifying funding models, aesthetics, marketing and forms that best serve the needs of US audiences. In order to accomplish this I hope that US practitioners will continue to be generous in sharing information about both their successes and challenges with TVY. I challenge US theatres and practitioners to try work for very young audiences, in doing so reaching out to early childhood educators and looking to organizations like Zero to Three or The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for information on the developmental, emotional and social needs of their target audience. From conducting my research, engaging in the three development processes and watching the child audiences engage with the products that were a part of this thesis I have come to believe that TVY is moving forward with a dedicated group of practitioners determined to provide young children with theatrical experiences of high educational and artistic value, intentionally designed to serve the youngest audiences.



## **Appendix**

### **Attachment 1: SPARK! Survey Sample (Pg. 21)**

**Artists responded to surveys online using SurveyMonkey and/or took part in interviews. Questions/Prompts were in reference to specific Theatre for the Very Young production/development process. Sample questions/prompts used included:**

#### **Questions about the artist:**

- What is your background as an artist?
- How did you begin working on Theatre for the Very Young?
- Please describe your experiences working with young children prior to beginning this project.
- Please describe your experiences working with parents prior to beginning this project.
- How do you define your role within the development of this piece?

#### **Questions about the process:**

- What goals do you have for this production?
- How are your goals similar to those of other productions you have worked on? How are they different?
- What considerations do you put in place for a Theatre for the Very Young piece?
- Please describe your process for creating new work in Theatre for the Very Young.
- When and how do you consider the audience's experience in creating new work?

#### **Questions about the product:**

- How do you define a successful Theatre for the Very Young performance?
- Please describe the role of the audience in your performance?
- How do you know if your audiences are engaged in the performance?  
What percentage of your audience engages with this performance?
- How would you describe very young audiences?

#### **Questions about the form:**

- What is your definition of Theatre for the Very Young?
- What, if any, limitations exist in creating Theatre for the Very Young?

**Attachment 2: SPARK! Memorandum of Agreement (Pg. 46)**

***SPARK! Theatre for the Very Young Ensemble***

***Role of a Ensemble Member*** \*Subject to change as necessary

As a SPARK! Ensemble Member you:

- Attend rehearsals and inform Bethany or Meg about any conflicts prior to missing rehearsal
- Be a positive, contributing member of the ensemble during rehearsals and performances
- Be given a voice in the creation of new TVY pieces through your contributions
- Have the opportunity to perform at least once with SPARK! during the Spring semester

***Role of Artistic Team*** \*Subject to change as necessary

The SPARK! Artistic Team (Bethany and Meg) will:

- Provide information and education on areas of child development and Theatre for the Very Young(TVY)
- Coordinate performances including artistic and logical details
- Provide a safe, informative and open rehearsal environment which strives to be fun work!
- Gain research data related to TVY through both rehearsals and performances
- Gain ideas, knowledge and bits from performance pieces that they can carry into future TVY productions

Bethany Lynn Corey  
[Bethany.Corey@gmail.com](mailto:Bethany.Corey@gmail.com)  
610-368-5380

Meg Greene  
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**Memorandum of Agreement for SPARK! Theatre Ensemble**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) in agreeing to become a member of the SPARK! Theatre Ensemble acknowledge that any monetary compensation received from SPARK! Theatre performances will be used to continue funding the organization and neither I nor any member of the Ensemble or Artistic Team will be directly compensated unless otherwise informed in writing. I also acknowledge the rights of the artistic team to the scripts being created for performance and therefore will not be compensated for future performances unless otherwise contracted for them. I have read and understand the role of ensemble members and the artistic team.

We agree to fulfill these terms to the best of my ability. Should any situation arise that necessitates any changes to our agreement we will discuss with all parties as soon as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Ensemble Member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of SPARK! Artistic Director)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**Attachment 3 Splish Splash Assessment (Pg. 63)**

**Theatre for the Very Young**  
**Audience Engagement Assessment**

**Research Questions:**

- How effective is the pre-show speak? What may need to be added, deleted or changed?
- What happens if the audience is never invited up to the stage?
- What does music with language do to a TVY production?

**Based on appearance please indicate the approximate Number of Children**

**Under age 1:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age 1-2** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age 2-3** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age 3-4** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age 4-5** \_\_\_\_\_ **Between 5-10** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Approximate Adult to Child Ratio was** \_\_\_\_\_ **to** \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Approximately every 5 minutes Assessor will scan the audience and check the box to indicate the percentage of the audience engaging in the actions that corresponds to each engagement indicator

**Section 1-Mono**

	<b><u>Under 20%</u></b>	<b><u>20-40%</u></b>	<b><u>40-60%</u></b>	<b><u>60-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Sitting Still</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2-Washclothes**

	<b><u>Under 20%</u></b>	<b><u>20-40%</u></b>	<b><u>40-60%</u></b>	<b><u>60-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-100%</u></b>
<b>Following Actions</b>					
<b>Eyes Focused</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 3-Soap

	<u>Under 20%</u>	<u>20-40%</u>	<u>40-60%</u>	<u>60-80%</u>	<u>80-100%</u>
<b>Interact with props</b>					
<b>Eyes Focused</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 4- Duck

	<u>Under 20%</u>	<u>20-40%</u>	<u>40-60%</u>	<u>60-80%</u>	<u>80-100%</u>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Sitting Still</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 5-Bubbles

	<u>Under 20%</u>	<u>20-40%</u>	<u>40-60%</u>	<u>60-80%</u>	<u>80-100%</u>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Singing/clapping/smiling /Mimicking actions of actors</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 5-Shower

	<u>Under 20%</u>	<u>20-40%</u>	<u>40-60%</u>	<u>60-80%</u>	<u>80-100%</u>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Singing/clapping/smiling /Mimicking actions of actors</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Comments:**

Child language of note used in during/following performance \_\_\_\_\_

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Did any moments stand out as particularly engaging/disengaging? \_\_\_\_\_

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Anything additional that should be noted? \_\_\_\_\_

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Assessor: \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Theatre for the Very Young**  
**Audience Engagement Assessment**

**Research Questions:**

- What are the implications/impact of extending a previous piece rather than recreating?
- How does non-verbal action play in the ACM context and within a narrative story?
- How does the audience last/engagement vary when participation is delayed?
- What is the impact of object transformation in an abstract way on engagement?

**Based on appearance please indicate the approximate Number of Children**

Under age 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Age 1-2 \_\_\_\_\_ Age 2-3 \_\_\_\_\_ Age 3-4 \_\_\_\_\_ Age 4-5 \_\_\_\_\_ Between 5-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
Approximate Adult to Child Ratio was \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Approximately every 3 minutes Assessor will scan the audience and check the box to indicate the percentage of the audience engaging in the actions that corresponds to each engagement indicator

Section 1-Opening into Duck

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Sitting Still</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 2-Appearance of Imaginary Friend(Dialogue Section)

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>

<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Sitting Still</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 3-Water(Fabric)

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes Focused</b>					
<b>Singing/Clapping/Smiling</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 4- Octopus

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes focused</b>					
<b>Interact with props</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 5-Oysters(Shakers)

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Singing/clapping/smiling /Mimicking actions of actors</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 6-Fish

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes are focused on</b>					

<b>Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Singing/clapping/smiling /Mimicking actions of actors</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 7-Water

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Singing/clapping/smiling</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

Section 8-Bubbles

	<b><u>Under 50%</u></b>	<b><u>50-65%</u></b>	<b><u>65-80%</u></b>	<b><u>80-90%</u></b>	<b><u>90-100%</u></b>
<b>Eyes are focused on Actors/Action</b>					
<b>Singing/clapping/smiling /Mimicking actions of actors</b>					

**Number of Children Visibly Upset/Crying** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Comments:**

**Child language of note used in during/following performance** \_\_\_\_\_



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**Did any moments stand out as particularly engaging/disengaging?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Anything additional that should be noted?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Assessor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Performance Date and Time:**\_\_\_\_\_

## The Balloon Project



### The Moon's a Balloon Residency with Dave Brown and Patch Theatre

'All sorts of possibilities reside in the simplest of things...'

The Balloon Project is a collaborative theatre-making process bringing Artistic Director Dave Brown from Patch Theatre of Adelaide, Australia to create new work at the University of Texas at Austin. The focus will be on the process of exploring theatre-making using Patch Theatre's artistic model which seeks to balance the multiple languages of theatre in making highly sophisticated non-didactic work for children.

Collaborators will include faculty, graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Texas at Austin Department of Performing Arts, as well as other Austin-based artists.

#### **To Apply:**

Submit the following interest form in hard copy to Assistant Director Bethany Lynn Corey in Winship B.122 or via email at [Bethany.Corey@gmail.com](mailto:Bethany.Corey@gmail.com) by November 16, 2012. We hope to involve everyone who is interested, final decisions will be made by December 3, 2012.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Year and Major \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in being considered for:

- ☐ Part 1 Theatre-making and am available January 7-13
- ☐ Part 2 Extending the Experience and am available January 13-19
- ☐ Both Part 1 and 2 January 7-19

Roles I would like to be considered for are (Please rank) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Skills I bring to the project include (simply list)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to be involved because (One or Two sentences please)\_\_\_\_\_

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### **Part 1: Creative exploration and Theatre-Making**

**Dates: Monday January 7- Sunday January 13, 2012**

Patch Theatre creates their work through a play-based and open-ended exploration process with the goal of engaging theatre-makers in balancing the multiple languages of theatre (music, sound, light, movement, projection, object manipulation) to create a highly poetic, visually simulating and elegantly simple piece of theatre for 4-8 -year-olds. While theatre-makers will take on specific roles, this process will invite all collaborators to be in the room together as we explore how multiple theatrical elements combine to create a 20-25 minute visual-theatre performance.

#### **Theatre-Making Roles:**

**Associate Directors** will collaborate in setting tasks, improvisations and provocations and then viewing, selecting and guiding the outcomes to an end-point. The directors will take responsibility for the visual-dramaturgy process by deciding how the image-segments will be composited.

**Performer/Theatre-Makers** will respond to the tasks and improvisational provocations to create outcomes. Promising pieces will be refined further and some will be composited into the final piece.

**Musician/Theatre-Maker** could be an improvising musician either with acoustic or digital instruments.

**Sound** – A person responsible hunting down existing music and sounds for the image-segments. Also responsible for the playing of audio and sound re-enforcement in the room.

**Stage Manager(s)** will be responsible for the preparation and organization of the balloon elements and other materials used in our process. They will stage manage the performance outcome.

**Lighting Technician/Designers** will define the role of lighting in the project. The palette will be limited and the possibilities will be explored and played with prior to defining a plan later in the process.

**Projection Artist** will be responsible for digital projection.

**Documenter** will conceive, film and edit a documentary short that provides an insight into the thoughts, processes and outcomes that result from the project.

**Videographer** will film and edit the segments that result from the tasks and improvisations so they can be collected, assessed, reviewed and finally used to help assemble the image-segments into an order.

### **Part 2: Community Engagement: Research and Development for Extending the Experience**

**Dates: Sunday January 13-Saturday January 19, 2012**  
**(Evenings plus daytime activity on weekend days)**

This part of the project will focus on the research and development of extension activities to build upon the performance created and performed the prior week. We will focus on identifying ways to use drama/theatre strategies for engaging community around visual theatre, exploring how theatre and classroom educators might use drama-based instruction to bring the world of the play to their students, and developing research/questions for further discovery and development. You can choose to be part of one or more of the community engagement groups.

**Community Engagement Roles include:**

**Teaching Artist Team** will look to focus on how the performance experience may extend into the classroom linking to student learning in the arts and curriculum through drama-based instruction.

**Community Engagement Brigade** will identify ways to engage the community in the piece thinking critically about how a theatre may choose to engage their audience around visual theatre for this age group.

**Research Committee** will identify possible areas of research relating to any of the work being done during this phase of the project, future development and/or performance of the piece. A major goal of the research committee is to identify how this process links to scholarship.

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## **Vita**

Bethany Lynn Corey anticipates receiving her MFA from The University of Texas at Austin in Drama and Theatre for Youth & Communities in May 2013. At The University of Texas at Austin much of Bethany's research has explored the use of drama and theatre for very young children. Corey's work in Theatre for the Very Young led to the creation of the SPARK! Theatre Ensemble ([www.sparktheatre.net](http://www.sparktheatre.net)) which produces original theatre pieces for children under the age of six. Corey has worked nationally and internationally as an actress, director and teaching artist. She holds a dual B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies: Music and Theatre for Children and Public Communications from American University in Washington, DC. Corey has worked with a number of arts organizations including: Drama for Schools, Trike Theatre, Patch Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Imagination Stage, US Performing Arts Camp and Educational Theatre Company. She currently serves as the chair of The American Alliance for Theatre and Education's International Network. For more information on Bethany Lynn Corey's work visit [www.bethanylynncorey.com](http://www.bethanylynncorey.com).

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This thesis was typed by Bethany Lynn Corey